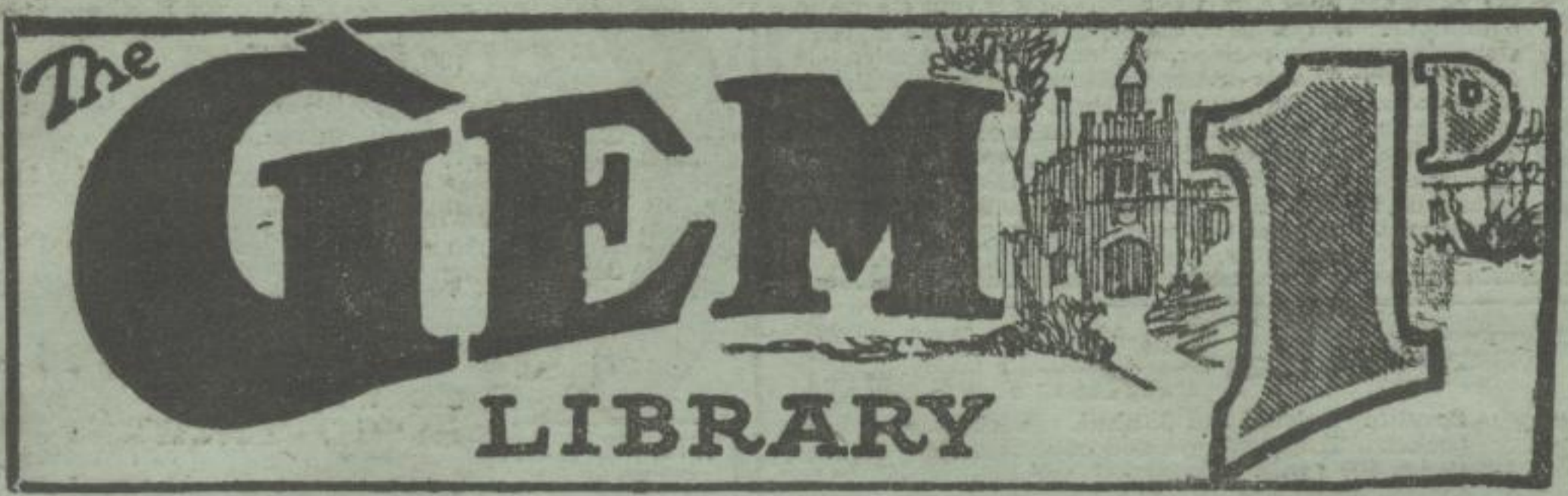


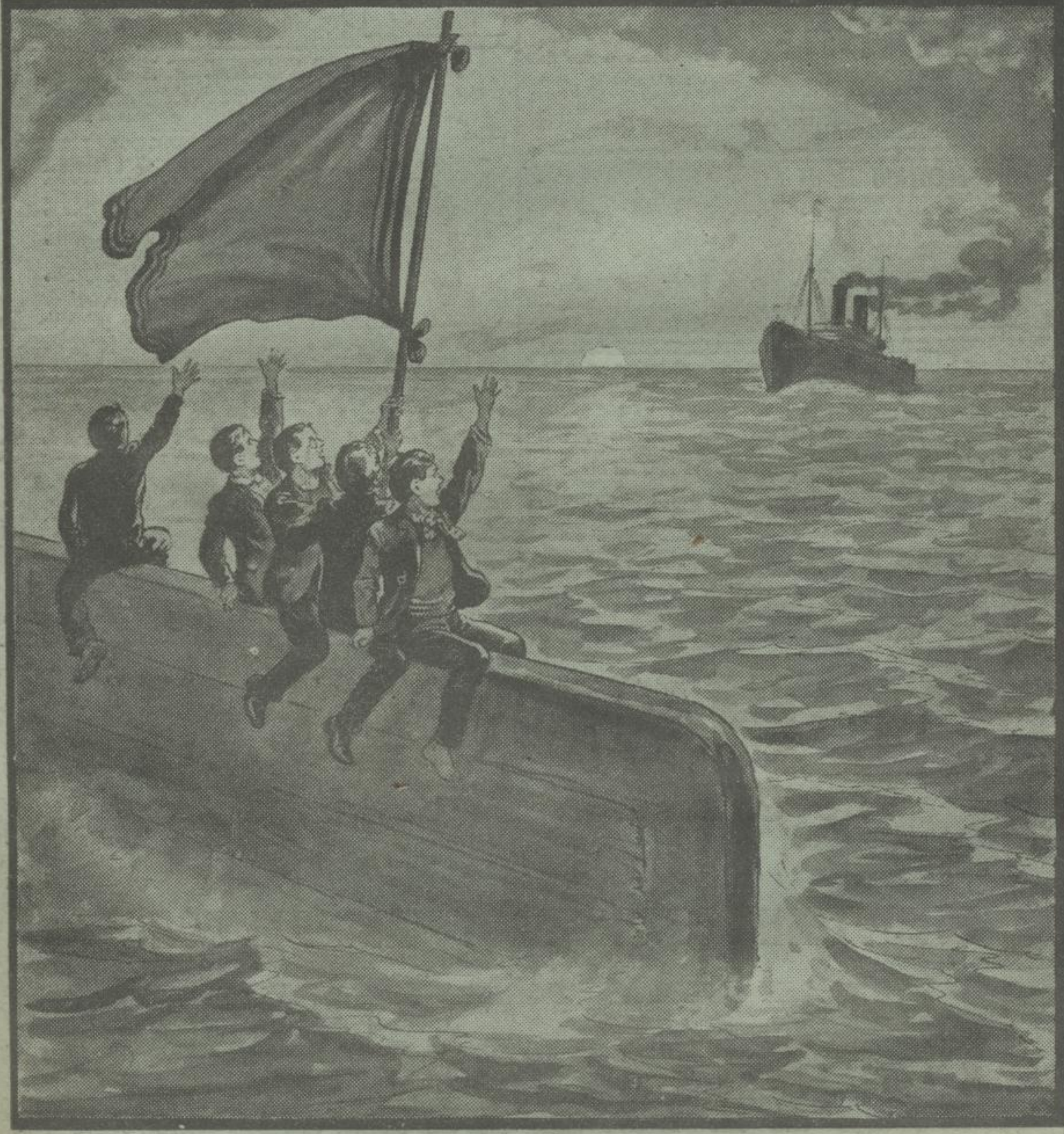
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THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale Dealing with the Exciting Adventures of
Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The juniors swept the sea with their weary eyes, as the dawn appeared. But there was no sail in sight—no smoke of a steamer—they were alone on the bosom of the vast Atlantic! (See Chapter 16.)

CHAPTER 1. An Exceptional Case.

"**TOM MEWWY—**"

"Slips!" said Tom Merry.

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy," repeated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, gently but firmly, "I am speakin' to you!"

"Slips!"

"I was about to wemark—"

"Then don't!" said Tom Merry, apparently waking up from his deep reverie, and looking absently at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "Can't you see that your uncle is worried? Slips, or—"

"I was goin' to say—"

"The question is," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brows in deep thought, "whether I'd better put Manners in as slips in Blake's place. It's like Blake's cheek to say he can't play on Wednesday, and cause all this bother to a harmless and necessary cricket captain. Perhaps Manners would be best."

"You will wequire a new long-stop as well, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus.

Tom stared at him.

As junior captain of the School House at St. Jim's, he had all the worries of the junior eleven on his shoulders, and the announcement of Jack Blake of the Fourth that he wouldn't be able to play in the slips on Wednesday was a

worry to him. The further announcement of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that he wouldn't be able to play long-stop was distinctly exasperating.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry warmly, "I'm getting fed up! I've a jolly good mind to leave you both out for good, and put in a couple of New House chaps permanently in your places!"

"Oh, wats!"

"Blessed if I know what you're thinking of!" said Tom indignantly. "What do you mean by slacking, you young bounders?"

"I'm not slackin', deah boy; but I have a vevy important engagement for to-morrow aftahnoon. Aftah all, the village match is not vevy important, and it will be a chance for some of the othah membahs of the club to show what they can do," said Arthur Augustus generously. "I believe in givin' evvwy chap a chance. And the team will beat Wylcombe Village, anyway!"

"That's not the point. I don't like shirkers," said Tom Merry severely. "Blow your important engagement! Chap oughtn't to cut a cricket-match because he's engaged—not even if he's married, by Jove!"

"I do not mean that kind of engagement, you ass! I am goin'—"

"Whatever it is, you chuck it up, and stick to your cricket!" said the captain of the Shell, frowning. "Cricket comes first!"

"I am goin' to have a motah-cah out—"

Next Wednesday:

"TRIED AND TRUE!" AND "PLAYING THE GAME!"

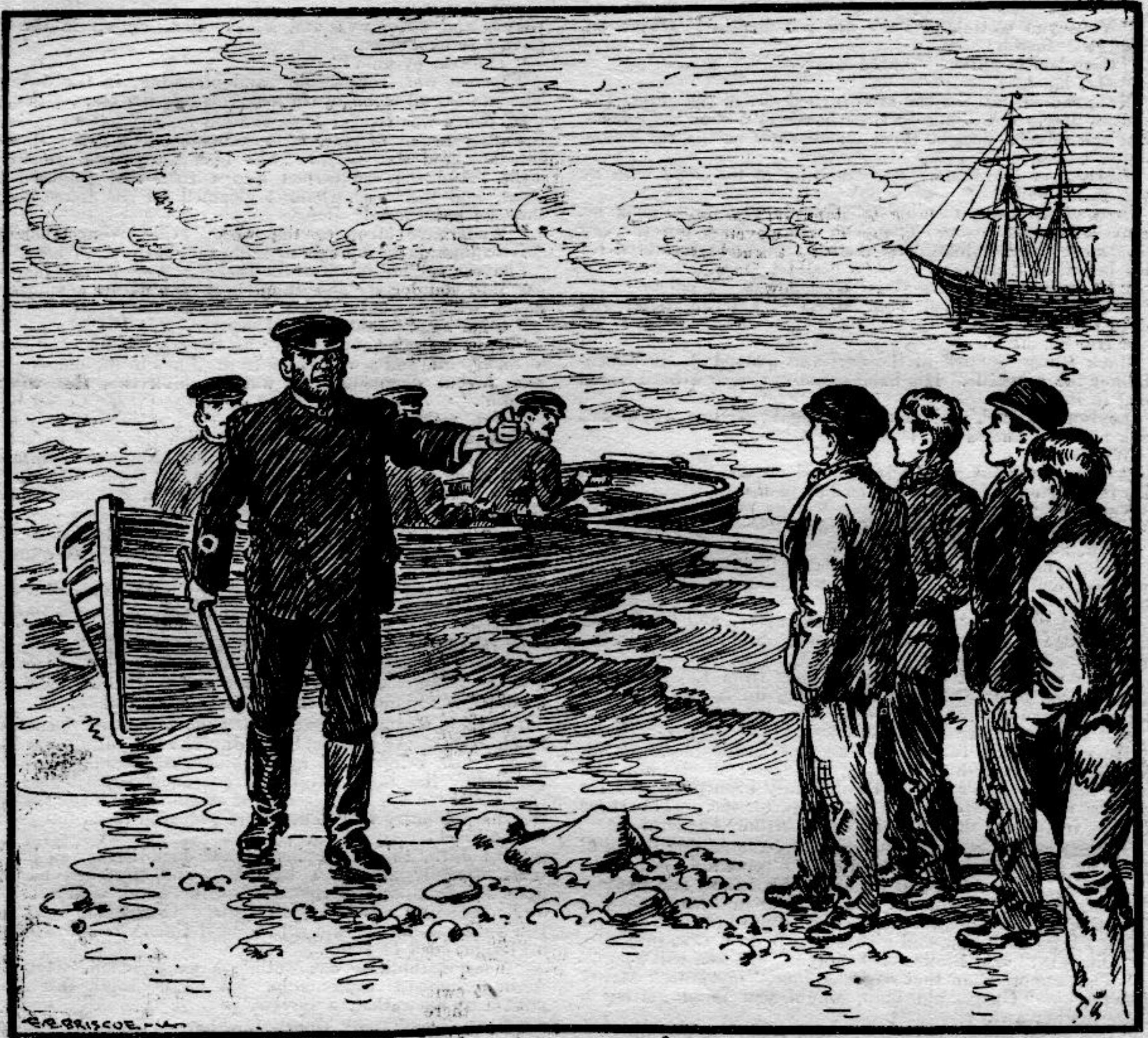
"Blow your motor-car!"
 "Blake is comin' with me—"
 "So that's why Blake can't play! Like his cheek!"
 "And I've asked Lowthah—"
 "No good asking Lowther; he won't cut the cricket-match to come out in a rotten motor-car!" grinned Tom Merry.
 "And he has said 'Yaas.'"
 "What-a-at!"
 "And now—"
 "Look here, I'm not going to stand it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Three members of my blessed eleven standing out of a cricket-match because you're taking a smell-tank out for a run! Why, it's rotten—it's the limit! Do you want me to fill up the team with New House fellows? I tell you, I won't hear of it!"
 "But weally, deah boy—"
 Tom Merry waved his hand.
 "I won't hear a word! You're going to play! I can't have my team mucked up because you're taking out a niff-box!"
 "We're goin' on a good long run," said Arthur Augustus. "We're goin' wight down to the coast, and along the coast aftah that, and then—"
 "You're not!" said Tom Merry decidedly.
 "Don't you think it will be wippin'?" demanded D'Arcy. "It looks like bein' fine weathah, and we shall weach the coast, and have a wippin' wun along in sight of the sea, and a splendid feed at the Sea-Cliff Hotel at Sandycliff—"
 "Yes, it would be ripping if it came off," said Tom Merry. "But it's not coming off. My cricket team isn't going to be mucked up, so that you can go and gorge at the Sea-Cliff Hotel at Sandycliff. Not much!"
 "And then a wun home in the evenin'," said Arthur Augustus—"by moonlight, you know. I've got special permish to stay out aftah callin'-ovah!"
 "Permission from whom?"
 "From the Housemaster, of course."
 "You've got to get permission from me yet," said Tom Merry. "It can't be did! Cricket comes first. Not a word. You're not going!"
 "I shall insist upon goin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "The othah fellows will be able to beat Wylcombe without me!"
 "Very likely; but it's the principle of the thing," said Tom Merry. "Cricket-matches can't be fooled about in this way! Three players taking themselves off like this, and only telling their captain the day before the match! It's the limit! I sha'n't allow it! I tell you, it can't be did! Scat!"
 "Four playahs, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.
 "Four!" howled Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say you've got the awful cheek to ask another member of the team?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "You—you—you cheeky image!"
 "You see, the cah is built to accommodate four fellows quite comfortably, and four is a vewy good numbah—"
 "Why don't you ask the whole blessed team?" shouted Tom Merry.
 "The cah wouldn't hold them all, deah boy," said D'Arcy innocently. "I'm askin' two of the Shell, and Blake and I are two of the Fourth, so that's quite faiah all wound!"
 "And the fourth chap—have you asked the blighter yet, and has he said 'Yes'?" demanded Tom Merry wrathfully.
 "I'm goin' to ask him, and I twust he will say 'Yaas.'"
 "Well, if he does, I don't," said the cricket captain; "and I'll jolly well punch his head if he tells me he's going!"
 "He won't tell you, deah boy."
 "What! Do you mean to say that he'd have the cheek, whoever he is, to go off without saying a word to me about it, when he's in my team?" exclaimed Tom Merry excitedly.
 "Yaas."
 "Well, let me see him do it, that's all!" said Tom, greatly incensed. "I'd show him that there's such a thing as

discipline in a cricket team, if I have to break every blessed bone in his body!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "What are you cackling at, you silly ass?"
 "I wefuse to be called a sillay ass! You haven't asked me the fellow's name yet!"
 "Well, what's his name?" growled Tom Merry. "He must be a measly rotter if he's thinking of going off and leaving the match to-morrow without saying a word to me!"
 "Yaas; but—"
 "I call him a rotten, crawling worm, and you can tell him I said so!" said Tom Merry hotly.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And if you don't stop cackling, I'll wipe up the floor with you!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Do you hear?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He laid a sudden grasp upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and proceeded to wipe up the floor with him. The swell of St. Jim's ceased to laugh, and roared instead.
 "Ow! Ow! Wefuse me, you sillay ass! You are wumplin' my clothes! Yawwooh!"
 Bump!
 The two juniors rolled on the floor of the passage together. Arthur Augustus was undermost, and Tom Merry proceeded to sit on his chest and keep him there. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasped and panted for breath.
 "Gewwooh! Gewwup! Lemme gewwup, you wottah! Wow-ow!"
 Blake and Monty Lowther and Manners came dashing along the passage.
 "What's the row?" demanded Blake of the Fourth.
 "Great Scott! Is that the way you receive invitations to motor-drives, Tom Merry?"
 Tom Merry jumped.
 "Invitations! What do you mean? I—"
 "You—you fwabjous ass, Tom Mewwy!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. "Gewwoff! I was just goin' to tell you the name of the chap I was mentionin'! The name is Tom Mewwy!"
 "Oh!" said Tom Merry.
 "Howevah," gasped Arthur Augustus, when he was permitted to regain his feet, and dusted himself down with his handkerchief—"howevah, if you weally feel that you can't miss the cwicket-match—"
 "Oh, that's all right!" said Tom Merry cordially. "I'll ask Figgins of the New House to captain the side. He'll do it like a bird. It's not such a very important match, after all. They'll easily beat Rylcombe without us!"
 "But if cwicket comes befoah evewythin' else—"
 "Well, there are exceptional cases," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "and upon the whole I think this is one of them. It's settled."
 And it was settled.

CHAPTER 2.
Off!

FOUR juniors of the School House at St. Jim's were looking particularly cheerful the next morning. The four were Tom Merry and Monty Lowther of the Shell, and Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. There were smiles of anticipation upon their faces even during morning lessons. They were looking forward very much to that excursion. When Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, did things, he did them in style. There was no denying that. Being the son of a noble lord, Arthur Augustus had many little advantages, among them being the use of the parental motor-car on great occasions. Lord Eastwood was sending the car that afternoon in charge of the chauffeur—though Arthur Augustus would have been equally pleased to dispense with the chauffeur. Arthur Augustus could drive a car, and drive it well; but his noble pater probably had some doubts about letting a party of juniors take entire charge of a car that had cost his lordship a thousand guineas. After lessons that morning, Arthur Augustus was busy in superintending the packing of a gigantic lunch-basket that was to be taken in the car. All his friends lent him expert advice on the subject. Fatty Wynn of the New House took quite a fatherly interest in the lunch-basket. He carried his kindness so far as to sample all the good things that were packed in it—indeed, Monty Lowther remarked that it was doubtful, at the finish, whether there was more of the grub in the lunch-basket than there was in Fatty Wynn.

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The mate jumped ashore, his face red with rage, and a boat-stretcher in his grip. He strode menacingly towards the juniors. "Tumble in!" he roared, pointing to the boat. "D'ye hear me! Tumble in!" (See Chapter 4.)

Figgins of the Fourth had agreed cordially to skipper the junior team in the cricket matter. Figgy was all the more willing to do that, because he had a secret persuasion that his skippering would be of a superior quality to that of any School House chap—even Tom Merry's.

After dinner, when Arthur Augustus and his comrades were expecting the arrival of the car, D'Arcy was the cyposure of all eyes, and the recipient of kind attentions from all sorts and conditions of fellows, who hinted gently that probably room could be found in the car for one more.

But Arthur Augustus shook his head at that. The car was a four-seater, and there you were.

"Othahwise, I should take you with pleasure, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus to at least fifty fellows one after another.

"There ought to be a New House chap in the party, you know," Fatty Wynn remarked, with a loving eye on the lunch-basket.

"Yaas; I only wish there was suffish space."

"There isn't room for one, let alone two!" remarked Monty Lowther, with a glance at Fatty Wynn's ample proportions.

"We'll give you a send-off when you start," said Kerr of the New House; and he smiled, and withdrew to consult with other New House fellows about that send-off.

"Here comes the giddy 'bus!" said Gore of the Shell.

It did not look much like a 'bus as it came sweeping up the drive—a very handsome and most expensive car.

The chauffeur jumped down and touched his cap to Arthur Augustus.

"Heah you are, Waggles!" said Arthur Augustus. "Good-aftahnoon, deah boy! Tumble in!"

Coats and rugs were placed in the car, and the four juniors took their seats.

"Now we are off!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, it's wippin' weathah for a wun! How long will it take you to weach the sea, Waggles?"

"About two hours, sir," said Raggles.

"Bai Jove! If you do it in one hour I'll stand a quid, Waggles!"

Raggles grinned.

"I'll try, sir."

And he "tooled" the car gently down the drive to the gates.

At the gates of St. Jim's quite an army of juniors had gathered to see the excursionists off.

They were mostly New House fellows, and they were smiling.

As the car came down to the gateway, with four smiling and cheerful faces inside, Kerr gave a signal.

Hands came out of pockets, with pea-shooters in them.

"Au wevoir, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, raising his silk hat politely to the crowd. "Au we— Bai Jove! Gwooh!"

He dropped his hat in the car as he felt a sudden sting on the nose, and clapped his hand to that organ with an exclamation.

"Bai Jove! What was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you wottahs! They are pea-shootin'! Dwive on, Waggles—fastah!"

"Give 'em a volley!" roared Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peas rained into the car as it turned out of the gates.

Tom Merry & Co. put up their hands to defend their faces, but the missiles caught them on all sides as the car swung out.

Levison of the Fourth was standing in the road with an egg in his hand.

Arthur Augustus caught sight of the egg, and shook his gloved fist at Levison. The peas were a joke, but the egg was more than a joke, and Arthur Augustus trembled for his beautiful "clobber."

"Levison, you wottah, you—"

"Chuck it!" shouted Tom Merry—"I mean, don't you dare to chuck it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake stooped in the car, and groped in the lunch-basket for a missile. His hand came out with a hard-boiled egg in it.

Levison grinned, and aimed his egg at Arthur Augustus's silk hat, and hurled it.

Whiz!

Arthur Augustus gave a jump, and unfortunately brought his face instead of his hat in the line of fire.

Squelch!

"Gwwwooh! Yawwooh! Oh, deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison.

Blake's hand came up with his egg in it, and his missile whizzed, and caught Levison full on the nose, and smashed there.

Levison gave a roar and staggered away, and stumbling on the edge of the ditch, lost his footing, and sat down in the water.

There was a loud splash and a roar from Levison as he disappeared backwards into the flowing ditch, and a yell of laughter from the other fellows.

But Arthur Augustus did not laugh.

He was rubbing furiously at his aristocratic face with his handkerchief, speedily reducing the latter to a limp and eggy rag. Levison's egg had apparently been preserved for a long time, for the odour of it was terrific. The three fellows in the car shrank away from Arthur Augustus.

The car rushed on down the road, and the muddy figure of Levison, scrambling out of the ditch, disappeared behind.

Arthur Augustus mopped furiously at his face, and panted.

"Oh, the uttah wottah! I shall give him a feahful thwashin' when we weturn to St. Jim's! Bai Jove! I think I'll go back now and give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake cheerfully. "Levison will keep!"

"That's more than that egg has done," murmured Monty Lowther. "Gussy, old man, would you mind getting a little further away?"

"Don't you come nearer me!" said Blake, in alarm.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I never was fond of scent," said Lowther—"especially that kind of scent. My hat! I really think we shall have to drop Gussy overboard."

"I must get a wash!" said Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "I must weally get a wash! This is howwid!"

"We'll stop at the Green Man, and you can wash your chivvy in the horse-trough," Monty Lowther suggested.

"I wefuse to wash my face in a horse-trough, Lowthah. We will stop at Mr. Mopps, the barbah's, and I will wash there."

And when the car entered Rylcombe, it halted outside the hairdresser's establishment, and Arthur Augustus invaded the premises of Mr. Mopps to wash the traces of Levison's highly-flavoured egg from his noble visage.

He came out fresh and smiling, his good-humour quite restored, and mounted into the car.

"Now we are off, deah boys!"

And the car ran on.

CHAPTER 3.

Fallen Among Thieves.

THE afternoon was cold, but bright and sunny, and the four juniors of St. Jim's keenly enjoyed the rapid run through country roads and lanes, where the early green of spring was beginning to show in the trees and hedges.

St. Jim's was left far behind as the car buzzed on southward towards the distant sea.

When the road was clear, Raggles let the car go at a speed that would certainly have ended in trouble if there had been watchful policemen about.

Villages and towns were passed, and wide woods, and

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CHUCKLES, 1st.

parcs, and meadows; and Blake, standing up in the car, gave a sudden shout:

"The sea, by gum!"

There it was, rolling blue and gleaming, in the distance. The juniors all stood up to look towards the sea.

St. Jim's was too far from the sea for the fellows to reach the coast on any of their little excursions, as a rule. But the car devoured the distance; the blue water was already in sight. And the car turned into a road that followed the coast, and the wide Channel gleamed on the left hand as they buzzed cheerily along.

"We'll have lunch on the cliffs," said Arthur Augustus. "It's quite warm enough to camp out heah, deah boys, and we have a wippin' lunch in the basket. Waggles can take the car into Sandycliff, and come back for us in a couple of hours, when we have had a wamble wound."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry.

"Then we can have a dwive up the coast latah, and dinner in Sandycliff, and a wun home to St. Jim's in the moonlight," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think that that will be wippin'."

"Yes, rather!"

The junior alighted from the car with the lunch-basket. It was still barely three o'clock. Arthur Augustus impressed upon Raggles to return in two hours for them, and handed him a sovereign to get his own lunch in Sandycliff. And Raggles ran on with the car.

It was a beautiful spot where the juniors had descended from the car—at a distance from any town, and quite to themselves.

The road ran along the sea, following the curve of a deep bay, and behind the road were the high cliffs, shutting off the land.

In the distance, at the end of the bay, could be seen the roofs of a fishing village, and a vessel lay at anchor there—a small sailing-vessel, with a rusty and dusty look, evidently an old "wind-jammer" that had seen plenty of service.

The juniors camped down among the rocks, and opened the lunch-basket. As they had had dinner at St. Jim's less than three hours before, and had a dinner again in prospect at Sandycliff, the lunch might have seemed superfluous; but they had keen appetites, rendered keener by the run through the sharp country air. They were prepared to do full justice to the lunch.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" said Jack Blake, as he lay back dreamily against a big rock, and stretched his legs upon soft sand, with a ripe peach in his hand, with which he was completing a substantial meal. "Gussy, I'll never call you a silly ass again—not till the next time. This was simply a glorious idea of yours."

"Yäas, I think it was wathah a good ideah," assented Arthur Augustus contentedly. "I weally think this aftahnoon will be wathah a success."

"First chop!" said Monty Lowther. "Pass the peaches, Blake, you bounder."

"Pass 'em, Gussy," said Blake. "I'm too comfy to move."

"Heah you are, deah boy."

"What are you looking at, Tom?" asked Lowther, as he noticed that Tom Merry was staring intently at the distant vessel at the end of the bay.

"Something going on there," said Tom, shading his eyes with his hand. "I wish we had some glasses—looks like a row."

The juniors all turned their eyes in the direction of the distant brig.

Dimly, in the distance, they could see that there was some excitement on the deck, but the figures were too far off to be made out clearly.

"I bwrought the field-glasses in the cah," said Arthur Augustus. "Didn't you think of gettin' them out, Blake?"

"No," yawned Blake.

"Didn't you, Tom Mewwy?"

"No."

"Well, you must be an ass."

"Didn't you, fathead?"

"Well, no; I nevah thought of it—"

"Lucky I did, then," said Monty Lowther, grinning, as he produced the field-glasses. "Here you are."

He opened the glasses and fixed them on the distant brig. Then he chuckled.

"What's going on?" asked Tom Merry.

"A row, I fancy. I can see a chap—must be a skipper by his clothes—waving his arms, and he looks as if he were using strong language."

"Bai Jove! Lend me the glasses."

The juniors looked in turn. They made out a red-bearded man, evidently the skipper, who was gesticulating and stamping on the deck. Two or three other figures were visible,

one of them that of the mate, who seemed to be in an explosive temper, too.

"Looks like being a giddy scrimmage," said Monty Lowther. "Good egg! No charge for front seats!"

But the excitement ended, and a boat was lowered, and the juniors saw the mate and three seamen enter it. They turned back to finish their lunch.

"When you've slacked long enough, deah boys, we'll have a wamble ovah the cliffs," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; a good idea to stretch our legs a bit," said Tom Merry—"Hallo! Who are these merchants? They look a rough crowd!"

Four fellows had come in sight, tramping along the road. They were lads but little older than the St. Jim's fellows, and evidently seamen. They looked a decidedly "rough crowd." Their clothes were shabby, and the bags of "dunnage" they carried were shabbier still. They stopped and stared at the juniors sitting on the rocks, and exchanged glances and whispers.

"Look out!" murmured Blake, alert at once. "There's going to be trouble. This is a lonely place; and those merchants look as if they'd just come out of chokey."

"Bai Jove! They do look wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus, surveying them through his eyeglass very disparagingly. "Howevah, there are four of us, and if they bothah us we will give them a thwashin' all round."

The other fellows had some slight doubts about that. The four strangers were older and bigger, and looked as if they had lived on "scraps." One of them had a black eye, and another had a black bruise on his cheek. All the four looked as if they had been up all the previous night, and fighting most of the time.

"Cheero!" said the young man with the black eye, hailing the juniors.

"Cheewo, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus politely. Arthur Augustus would have been polite to Bill Sikes, if he had met that celebrated character.

"Doin' yerselves well, by hokey—ch?" said the black-eyed young man.

"Yaas, thank you vevy much."

There were further whispers among the four hooligans—for hooligans they undoubtedly were. Then they came closer.

"Luck we kim along, ain't it?" said the black-eyed fellow.

"We bin in trouble, and we want to be 'elped on our wye."

"We does, Sharpey," said the fellow with the bruised cheek. "The old man's arter us already; and if he catches us—"

"And we came away without our pay," said Sharpey. "You can't get along on land without rhino; you git aground in no time."

"Ear, 'ear!" said the others, in chorus.

The juniors rose to their feet. It was quite plain that the hooligans meant mischief; and though the advantage was on the side of Sharpey and his friends, Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of submitting tamely. The four juniors drew together, and stood on their guard.

Sharpey chuckled.

"We ain't got no time to wyste," he said. "Will you young gents oblige four pore seamen wot has had to cut and run from a crool skipper?"

"You're deserters!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"We've lit out," said Sharpey. "'Cause why? Did we know that it was Captain Gunn when we signed on? And we was drunk, wasn't we, Billy?"

"We was!" said Billy.

"And Captain Gunn's a 'oly terror!" said Sharpey impressively. "He can't get 'ardly a sailorman to sail with 'im—he's that 'andy with a 'andspike. When 'e's squiffy, 'e goes for the mate 'isself. That's Captain Gunn. So we've dodged 'im—see? And we are on the rocks—the 'oly rocks—and we want 'elping on our way."

"I am sowwy, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "If a soveweign would be any good—"

"Lots of good!" said Sharpey. "But that ain't all. Captain Gunn will raise Cain to find us—cause why? He's left short-handed. We slipped ashore when he was drunk in his cabin—and the mate was glorious, too—and that's 'ow we 'ooked it. But he can't sail again till he's got men—and where is he to get men 'ere? He's stranded—that's wot Captain Gunn is!"

"And won't he ramp, too!" said Billy.

"I believe you," said Sharpey.

Tom Merry & Co. understood now the cause of the excitement they had witnessed on the brig in the bay. The desertion of the four young rascals had been discovered. And a skipper who found himself too short-handed to sail, in a place where it was impossible to obtain fresh men, naturally "ramped" a little.

"And the long and the short of it is," said Sharpey, "we're

goin' to change clothes with you young gents, if you don't mind."

"But we jolly well do mind!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly. "You're certainly not going to have our clothes, you cheeky rotter."

"Wathah not! I'm sowwy if you had a bad captain, deah boys; and I would be too willin' to stand a soveweign to assist you, but most certainly you cannot have our clobber," said Arthur Augustus, with great indignation.

Sharpey grunted. "You'll 'and over your clobber, and wot tin you've got about you," he said. "Totherwise, we shall take it. That's 'ow it stands!"

"Line up," said Tom Merry. "You'd better keep off, you scoundrels. If you try to rob us, there will be trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"'Nuff jore!" said Sharpey roughly. "Are you goin' to 'and over your dunnage, or are you not, peaceable?"

"No!"

"Then kim on, pals!"

And the four hooligans, without another word, rushed upon the juniors; and in a moment more there was a wild and whirling fight in progress.

CHAPTER 4.

A Complete Change.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood up bravely to the attack. They were "fighting-men" of great renown in their school, and well able to take care of themselves, as a rule. But the odds, in size and strength, were heavily against them now.

Sharpey rolled over on the rocks, stretched there by a terrific right-hander from Tom Merry, and he roared with pain and fury.

But the next moment he was up and at close quarters with the Shell fellow, and they gripped and struggled for the mastery.

Tom Merry fought hard, but he went down, with Sharpey on him, gripping him and pommelling savagely.

Blake was down too, with another young ruffian sprawling over him; and both Lowther and D'Arcy were at handgrips with their foes.

The juniors fought to a finish, but it was hopeless, and soon they lay breathless and exhausted in the grasp of the four ruffians.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Sharpey, gasping. "Jolly tough kids fur schoolboys, and it's me that's sayin' it! But we got 'em!"

"You uttah wottahs—"

"Avast, there!" growled Sharpey. "Belay the jaw! 'Ave their duds off'n em, pals!"

The juniors had hardly a struggle left in them, and there was no help in that lonely place. The four hooligans dragged them by force round the rocks, so that they would be hidden from the road, and there Sharpey brandished a cudgel over them.

"Now strip!" he commanded. "And, by hokey, if you ain't sharp about it, I'll brain yer!"

"Nevah, you wottah!"

Sharpey aimed a blow at Arthur Augustus with the cudgel. If that blow had reached the mark, the swell of St. Jim's would have fallen, stunned. Jack Blake dragged him back just in time.

"It's no good," muttered Blake. "We've had the worst of it. We'll have to stand it."

"Wats! I wefuse—"

Sharpey uttered a savage oath, and struck at the swell of St. Jim's again. Arthur Augustus did not avoid the blow this time—he could not—and he fell like a log.

The juniors uttered a shout of wrath, and, reckless of consequences, they sprang at the ruffian.

But the hooligans piled on them, and they were hurled down again, and Sharpey brandished the cudgel once more. Arthur Augustus lay insensible on the sand.

"If you young fools don't want the same, you'll obey horders!" said Sharpey between his teeth. "We ain't got no time to wyste, with the old man arter us."

There was no help for it.

The juniors, panting with exhaustion and fury, stripped off their clothes, one of the hooligans stripping the elegant attire from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had not yet recovered his senses.

The juniors stood shivering in their underclothing. And then the four ruffians stripped in turn, throwing their ragged clothes to the shivering juniors.

"You can 'ave that there clobber!" said Sharpey, with a chuckle. "We ain't no use for it now, 'as we, mates?"

"We ain't!" grinned his comrades.

The four hooligans, with their dirty, bruised faces, looked very odd indeed in the clothes of the St. Jim's juniors.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The clothes were a tight fit for them, too—the jackets tight, and the trousers scarcely long enough. But there was no doubt they had gained by the exchange.

"We kin pawn this 'ere clobber in the fust town we come to," Sharpey remarked to his friends, "and git suthin' else. Anywe, we don't answer now to the diskripshun Captain Gunn will send out about us—wot?"

"We doesn't!" grinned Bill.

"And there's cash in these 'ere pockets," said Sharpey. "I reckon we're finished 'ere. So long, young gents, and much obliged."

And the quartette of thieves went grinning on their way.

Arthur Augustus sat up, gasping, and rubbing his head, and shivered.

"Bai Jove, what has happened, deah boys?" he exclaimed dazedly.

Blake mopped a nose that was streaming with red. The tussle had been hard, and all the juniors showed signs of conflict.

"We're done!" he growled.

"Gweat Scott! Where's my clobber?"

"Along with ours," snapped Monty Lowther—"walking down the road, with a blessed hooligan inside!"

"Oh deah! I've got a feahful bump on my nappah!" said Arthur Augustus, feeling his head tenderly. "This is feahfully wotten, deah boy! Wathah a beastly wind-up to a weally nice excursion—what?"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry, as cheerfully as he could. "It's nobody's fault. Things will happen sometimes, you know. We'd better get into those clothes they've left; it's too jolly cold like this. And we couldn't go into Sandycliff without any clothes on, even in the car."

Blake had already begun to dress himself in the tattered sailor garb left by the redoubtable Sharpey. Lowther and Tom Merry followed suit. Arthur Augustus glanced dolefully at the last set of dirty attire.

"Gweat Scott! How can I possibly dwess in this?" he said plaintively. "It's not only wagged—I could stand wags—but it is dirty, and howwid!"

"Better than nothing!" growled Blake.

"Oh, the awful wottahs!" groaned D'Arcy, as he pulled on the tarry trousers. "These wotten things are too long for me! Whatevah shall I do?"

"Turn 'em up, fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's no good growling," said Tom Merry. "As soon as Raggles comes back with the car, we'll scoot into Sandycliff, and put the police after those scoundrels. They may catch them, and get our clothes back, before we have to start for St. Jim's."

"Waggles won't be back for an hour yet," said Arthur Augustus dismally. "What's the time now, deah boys?"

"How can we tell the time without any watches, fathead?" asked Blake, whose temper was suffering a little from a swollen nose, a cut lip, and a black eye.

"Bai Jove! Have they taken our watches? My tickah—it was a pwesent fwom my patah on a birthday, you know. Has it gone?"

"Watches were made to go!" said Monty Lowther, with a dismal attempt at humour.

"Oh, wats! Pway don't be funnay now, Lowthah! I'm wathah wowwied about my tickah, as it was a birthday pwesent."

"The police may get it back," said Tom Merry. "But what a precious set of sights we look!"

They did!

The ragged and dirty attire left by Sharpey & Co. seemed to suit their grubby, bruised faces. Nobody, certainly, would have taken the juniors for St. Jim's fellows at that moment. They looked like a particularly dirty and ill-favoured set of tramps.

"Bai Jove, it will be wathah a surpwise for Waggles when he comes back!" said Arthur Augustus.

"How long is he going to be?" groaned Blake.

"Less than an hour now," said Tom Merry.

"I want a beef-steak for my eye—"

"I say, it's no good waiting here for the car," said Lowther. "Let's walk along towards Sandycliff: We shall meet Raggles on the road when he comes along."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Blessed if I like being seen like this!" said Blake. "Still, it's a good idea. We can leave the lunch-basket among the rocks here, and pick it up in the car. I don't feel much like carrying it."

"Good egg!"

The lunch-basket was repacked, and bestowed in a safe place in a hollow of the rocks, and then the juniors tramped up the beach to the road, and turned their steps in the direction of the distant town. As they did so they saw the boat, which they had watched leaving the brig some time before, pulling towards the shore in their direction.

They paused to glance at it.

"That's the mate steering, by his clothes," said Lowther. "I suppose they're after those four rotters. I'd give 'em any help I could to catch them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's waving his hand to us," said Tom Merry.

The mate was standing up in the boat as the seamen pulled towards the shore. He had evidently caught sight of the juniors on the road by the sea, and was hailing them, but the wind carried his voice away. But his gesticulations could not be mistaken. He was signing to the juniors to come down to the water's-edge and meet the boat.

"He wants to ask us if we've seen those deserters," said Tom Merry. "I don't see why we shouldn't tell him. They've robbed us, and the sooner they're laid by the heels the better."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then."

And, leaving the road, the four juniors walked down the beach towards the crisping edge of the sea. The mate sat down again, steering the boat, and the seamen pulled harder at the oars. The mate was speaking, but the wind was off shore, and it carried his voice away. The juniors saw his lips moving incessantly, but they did not catch a sound. They had no doubt, however, what he wanted—information as to whether they had seen the deserting seamen passing in that direction.

And they were only too willing to tell him all they knew, and to join in the pursuit, if necessary, to regain the things they had been robbed of.

They stood on the shingle, waiting for the boat, which was racing shoreward now. The bows bumped into the sand, and the mate jumped ashore, his face red with rage, and a boat-stretcher in his grip.

He pointed to the boat.

"Tumble in, you scum! Get in, or, by thunder, I'll brain you, and take back your carcasses! D'ye hear me? Tumble in!"

CHAPTER 5.

Mistaken Identity!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly at the infuriated mate.

For the moment they failed to grasp his meaning. His flushed face, and the scent of rum his voice wafted to them, showed that he had been drinking, though he was not exactly intoxicated. He was evidently in a towering rage.

"You 'ear me?" he shouted.

"Weally—" began Arthur Augustus.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I mean what I says!" replied the mate, with a menacing motion of the boat-stretcher. "You deserting dogs! Get into that boat before I brain you!"

"But why should we get into the boat?"

"Because I order you to!" roared the mate.

"I don't understand you," said Tom Merry. "We thought you wanted us to— Hands off, you ruffian!"

The mate was rushing at him.

The four juniors sprang together, and stood up to him, and the man lowered the boat-stretcher which he had raised. His face was inflamed with rage.

"You'll resist, you dogs?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly we shall!" said Tom Merry, his eyes flashing. "How dare you speak to us like that?"

"Dare," repeated the mate, choking—"dare! You—you lop-eared son of a swab! You say 'dare' to Amos Harker, first mate of the Ramchunder? You—you scum of the fore-castle!"

"I think you must be drunk," said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"Will you get into that boat?"

"No, we won't!"

"Wathah not!"

The mate shouted to the seamen in the boat, who were watching the scene curiously, and grinning.

"Come ashore, you swabs, and pitch them in! Do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"What!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You—you drunken fool, what do you mean?"

"I'll 'drunken fool' you when I get you on board the Ramchunder!" said the mate between his teeth. "I'll learn you!"

ANSWERS

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," 10. Every Saturday, 2

You can bet on that! Oh, yes, you can bet your sweet life on that, you leavings of the gallows! I'll teach you to desert your ship and give back-talk to your officer when he runs you down—so I will!"

A light broke on the juniors. They remembered that they were in the clothes of the deserters, and their faces, bruised and soiled in the fight and by rolling in the sand, were scarcely recognisable. The half-intoxicated mate, seeing them on the shore, had taken them for Sharpey & Co., and he was still labouring under the mistake.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh at the idea.

"I think I understand now," he exclaimed. "You think we are the four fellows who deserted from your ship."

"Ay, ay! I've caught you!"

"We're nothing of the kind. Those fellows robbed us of our clothes—"

"Yaas, wathah, and gave us these beastly wags—"

"And they're gone."

"We're schoolboys," Tom Merry explained. "We're not the fellows you want. Look at our faces, and you'll see you're mistaken."

The mate burst into a scoffing laugh.

"You lying scum! You know I've just joined the Ramchunder, and I don't know your ugly figureheads from Satan. But I know you're the four young scoundrels who deserted from the brig yonder, and I'm going to take you back."

"You're jolly well not!" exclaimed Jack Blake warmly.

"We're not going in that boat! Come on, you fellows! We'll get out of this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Belay there! Collar the scum, my lads!"

The three seamen, who plainly stood in terror of the big mate's "tantrums," intercepted the juniors and herded them back. A fight with four grown-up men was rather too large an order for Tom Merry & Co., especially as the mate was still grasping the boat-stretcher. And the juniors were not in a condition, either, for such a desperate affray after their struggle with Sharpey & Co.

"Now you git into that boat!" said the mate menacingly.

"But I tell you—"

"If you don't git in you'll be chucked in, as sure as my name's Amos Harker!"

"Let us explain," exclaimed Monty Lowther. "We're not the fellows you're after. We're schoolboys. They took our clothes—"

"Tell that to the marines! Tumble in!"

"Look here! Your men must know that we're not the fellows you're looking for!" said Tom Merry desperately. "Ask them. They must know the deserters by sight."

The three seamen were grinning. They were all three very tough-looking specimens, much the same kidney as Sharpey & Co.

The mate glanced at them, with a threatening scowl.

"Do you say that these young swabs ain't the ones I'm looking for?" he demanded, with a threatening movement of the boat-stretcher.

And the three seamen hastened to reply in chorus:

"They're the swabs, sir!"

"Now will you tell me any more of your lies, you—you Dagoes?" growled the mate.

"They're not telling the truth. They're afraid of you."

"Belay your jaw! Are you going into the boat or not? That's the last time of asking. By hokey, I'll waste no more time on ye!"

And the mate signed to the seamen to throw the boys in, and the three rough fellows advanced with alacrity to obey.

"We'd better get in," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "We can't fight this gang, and we can explain to the captain when we get aboard. He will know that we're not the deserters, and he'll send us ashore again."

"Yaas, that's so, deah boy."

The juniors tramped down the sand and stepped into the boat. There was nothing else for it. They had to get in or be thrown in. And it seemed undoubted, of course, that as soon as they were aboard the brig and explanation to the skipper would set matters right. The skipper would not want, and would not dare, to take four schoolboys to sea in the place of the hands he had lost.

The mate jumped into the boat, the seamen took the oars, and they pushed off.

Tom Merry & Co. sat silent during the passage to the anchored brig. But the mate was not silent. Amos had a fine flow of language, and he let the juniors have the full benefit of it during the row across the bay. Tom Merry & Co. had never heard such luridly descriptive speech before. But they were destined to hear a good deal more of it before they had finished with the acquaintance of Mr. Harker.

The boat bumped against the brig, and the skipper looked down over the side.

"Got them?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You know wot to do, then, Mr. Harker."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And Captain Gunn went below. The juniors clambered on the brig, and the boat was swung in. Tom Merry looked round him.

"Where is the captain, please?" he asked a big, burly man with a thick black beard, who was directing the taking-in of the boat.

The man stared at him.

"Don't talk to me, you young swab!"

And, with a backward sweep of his hand, the boatswain—for such he was—sent Tom Merry fairly reeling across the deck.

The junior collapsed, with a gasp of pain and surprise. There was an exclamation of indignation from his comrades. "You rotten brute!" shouted Monty Lowther.

The boatswain did not reply to that. He was busy with the boat and with cursing a seaman who had let slip a fall. But when the boat was swinging at the davits, he turned on the Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

But Mr. Harker interposed.

"You can leave the young swabs to me, Mr. Hogg. I'll l'arn 'em! Captain Gunn has left 'em in my hands."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Ben Hogg, with a savage look at the boys.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. He had been dazed by the blow the boatswain had given him, and he had lain on the deck half-stunned.

"We demand to see the captain!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"We don't belong to this ship. We are not sailors at all. We are schoolboys."

"Still that yarn?" said Amos Harker with a sneering laugh. "Well, I'll l'arn yer! Give me a rope's-end, Ben Hogg."

"Here you are, sir!"

The mate grasped the knotted length of rope, and rushed at the juniors. Without a word of warning, he began lashing them with savage force. And the crew—probably having had some of the same experience themselves at various times—stood round and looked on, evidently without the slightest intention of interfering in any way.

CHAPTER 6.

Shanghaied!

TOM MERRY & CO. were too astounded and dazed to resist for a moment or two.

The mate, under the belief that they were the deserters, was punishing them for the desertion and for the trouble they had given him, and his ideas of administering punishment were drastic in the extreme.

The thick, knotted rope struck with almost the force of a cudgel, and the mate's arm was very powerful.

He cursed them with lurid eloquence as he smote, with a wild variety of epithets, many of which they did not even understand.

The juniors yelled as the blows fell, but after the first moment or two they did not take the punishment without resistance.

They piled on the mate, and, in spite of his savage blows, collared him, and, combining their efforts, dragged him down on the deck.

The seamen, looking on, simply gasped. That was rank mutiny. There was not a man on board the Ramchunder who would have dared to do likewise.

"Mutiny!" roared the mate, as he went struggling down. "Lend a hand here, Ben Hogg!"

"Mutiny, by gum!" exclaimed Hogg.

He ran into the scuffle, hitting out savagely. D'Arcy received his heavy fist, hard and heavy as a hammer, and was flung clear across the deck by the blow. Lowther caught the next blow, and rolled over, panting. Then the powerful boatswain seized Tom Merry and Blake, one in either hand, and wrenched them off the mate.

Mr. Harker staggered to his feet.

His face was almost demoniac with rage now.

He groped for the rope's-end, and recovered it, and yelled to the crew to hold the delinquents while he thrashed them.

The order was promptly obeyed.

Tom Merry and his comrades were grasped in powerful hands, and held helpless, while the mate rained blows upon them.

It seemed like some evil dream to the unfortunate juniors. It was as if they had entered into some new world, where all things were strange and harsh and cruel.

They struggled feebly, but their struggles were useless. They were held fast, and they were at the mercy of Amos Harker.

And there was no mercy in the heart of the "bucko" mate.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"TRIED AND TRUE!"

He lashed them till his arm was tired and aching, and their clothes were cut and rent by the blows, and the blood was streaming from their torn skin.

Not till he was too tired to thrash them further did he desist. Then he drew down the rope's-end with a breathless oath.

"Pitch them into the fo'c's'le," he said.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And the four juniors were dragged to the fore-forecastle, and pitched down into the murky and evil-smelling fore-forecastle of the Ramchunder.

They rolled there on the planks, dazed, bleeding, racked with pain, too worn out even to be angry or indignant.

There they lay exhausted.

There were sounds on deck, and a motion of the ship ere long, and Tom Merry sat up dazedly and groaned.

"I say, chaps, they're putting to sea," he muttered.

"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"We shall be taken out to sea unless we see the captain and explain in time," said Tom desperately. "Good heavens, if we sail in this horrible ship, goodness knows when we shall get out again!"

"No go!" said Blake faintly. "The captain's most likely as big a brute as the mate. They want hands, and they won't let us go."

"But they dare not!"

"They will; you'll see. Not that I think that brute will let you get near the captain."

"I'm going to try," said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Well, try; but it won't be any good."

Tom Merry rose to his feet with difficulty, for he was aching and exhausted. He groped forward to the opening, and clambered up the three rickety steps that led from the fore-forecastle, and reached the deck. The men of the Ramchunder were busy putting to sea. The boatswain was shouting and swearing. He caught sight of Tom Merry, and made a stride towards him.

"Turn to, you lazy lubber! Make yourself useful."

"I want to see the captain!"

"Still on that tack?" said Ben Hogg. "Take that!"

"That" was a heavy blow which knocked the junior down the steps into the murky fore-forecastle again. He rolled there, gasping.

"Well, how did it answer?" asked Blake miserably.

Tom gritted his teeth.

"It's no good. We've got to stand it."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus weakly. "This is howwid, you know. I wondah what Waggles will think when he comes back with the car and finds us gone? What will they think at St. Jim's, bai Jove!"

"Never mind St. Jim's. The question is, how are we to get out of this rotten craft?" growled Blake.

"We've been shanghaied," said Lowther; "that's what sailormen call it. I believe that brute of a mate knew we were not the deserters, but he pretended to think we were because they want hands."

"But, bai Jove, we're not goin' to work on this ship, deah boy!"

"I fancy we shall have a pretty rough time if we don't."

"But—but the beastly ship may be goin' to Amewicah or China or somewhah, and we shall be cawwied away for weeks, pewwaps months!"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh, gweat Scott, what a wotten endin' to our little wun in the motah-car!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I weally think that we cannot considah our holiday a success, aftah all, deah boys!"

"A rotten, rank, ghastly failure!" said Monty Lowther. "But what the dooce are we going to do? I'm aching all over."

"Same here!" groaned Blake.

Arthur Augustus staggered up, holding on to a bunk.

"And shall we have to sleep in these howwid quartahs, if we wemain on board?" he murmured. "The place is not even clean, deah boys. And it smells howwid!"

"Don't go on deck," said Tom Merry.

"I weally think I had bettah twy to see the captain and wemonstwate with him."

"No good. You'll only be handled."

"I shall wefuse—ahem!—I suppose I shall have to wisk it?" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I can dodge the bwutes and get aft to the captain."

And D'Arcy went on deck, clinging as he went, for the Ramchunder was rolling in the bay now, going out into the Channel before the wind.

A minute later, Arthur Augustus returned in a hurtling manner, descending with a bump on the plank.

"Yawwooh! The wuff bwute! Ow!"

"I told you so!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Ow, ow! I am howwibly bwuised! Bai Jove," said

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Arthur Augustus in a concentrated voice, "I'd give a term's pocket-money to give that bwute Harkah a feahful thwashin'. But I am afwaid he is wathah too stwong for me."

There was no doubt upon that point.

The juniors did not attempt to leave the fore-forecastle again. They knew it was useless, or worse than useless. They remained, feeling miserable enough, aching from the terrible thrashing they had received, and sick from the motion of the ship; while the heavy, clumsy old "wind-jammer" bumped and thumped on through the chops of the Channel.

CHAPTER 7.

At Sea!

TOM MERRY & CO. had been to sea before more than once, and they had fancied that they were good sailors. But they had never been on the salt water under such circumstances as these.

A big steamer, or a well-found yacht, was very different from the rolling, clumsy, thumping old tub upon which they now found themselves.

The Ramchunder had never been a good boat, and she was long past her best days. The way she rolled was unspeakable, and she thumped into the seas by the head in a way that suggested that at every thump she was making her last plunge in the direction of Davy Jones's locker. And the fore-forecastle was small, close, evil-smelling, and dirty. There was a lingering odour of bilge that would have turned many a sailor sick, added to the motion of the vessel. And the juniors were excited, worried, and worn out. Altogether, they were certain to be sick, and they were very sick indeed.

They climbed into bunks, and lay down, feeling so utterly wretched that death would have seemed a boon just then.

They no longer cared whether they were "shanghaied" or not—whether they ever saw St. Jim's again or not—whether the Ramchunder was bound for Dover or for the Dardanelles.

They were at the nadir of human misery.

How long it lasted they did not know. It seemed like centuries—long centuries of horror and disgust and misery.

Darkness came down. The fore-forecastle was densely dark before the sun had gone, but no one came down.

The crew of the Ramchunder was busy on deck.

Although the mate had insisted that the four juniors were the four deserters of whom he had been in search, he did not order them on deck, thus as good as admitting that he knew they were no sailors, and useless just then above decks.

He had been mistaken about them at first, but afterwards he must have observed that they were not ship's boys; but he chose to continue the mistake as a pretext for keeping them as "hands."

The Ramchunder was evidently in a hurry to get to sea; and from what the juniors had seen of the crew, Captain Gunn was not particular about the kind of men he shipped. Indeed, if he was anything like his mate, he probably had difficulty in getting decent sailormen to take billets on the Ramchunder. A bad ship, a bad mate, and a bad captain, were not likely to attract good seamen. That accounted for the fact that the whole forrard crowd of the Ramchunder seemed to be of the hooligan variety. Sharpey & Co. had been fair specimens of the rest.

If the juniors had been ordered on deck, they could not have gone. They could not have dragged their limbs up the three steps to the deck. But they were not called—indeed, their existence seemed to have been forgotten.

There was a step at last on the ladder, and someone came blundering down in the darkness, cursing.

"No light 'ere!" growled a voice, which the juniors recognised as Ben Hogg's. The boatswain evidently berthed forrard with the crew.

A match was struck, and the boatswain lighted a dirty, swinging oil lamp, which cast a dim, dull light over the fore-forecastle interior.

Ben Hogg glanced about him, and saw the four white, drawn faces looking out from the bunks, and grinned.

"Ho! 'Ere you are!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, here we are!" said Blake.

"Don't you know sea manners yet, you young swabs? Call me sir!"

Blake's eyes gleamed; but he had already learned the folly of resistance to overwhelming force.

"Very well, sir."

"Very well, sir!" mimicked Hogg. "Where were you brought up, you sweepings of Wapping? Can't you say 'Ay, ay!' like a sailorman, you lubber?"

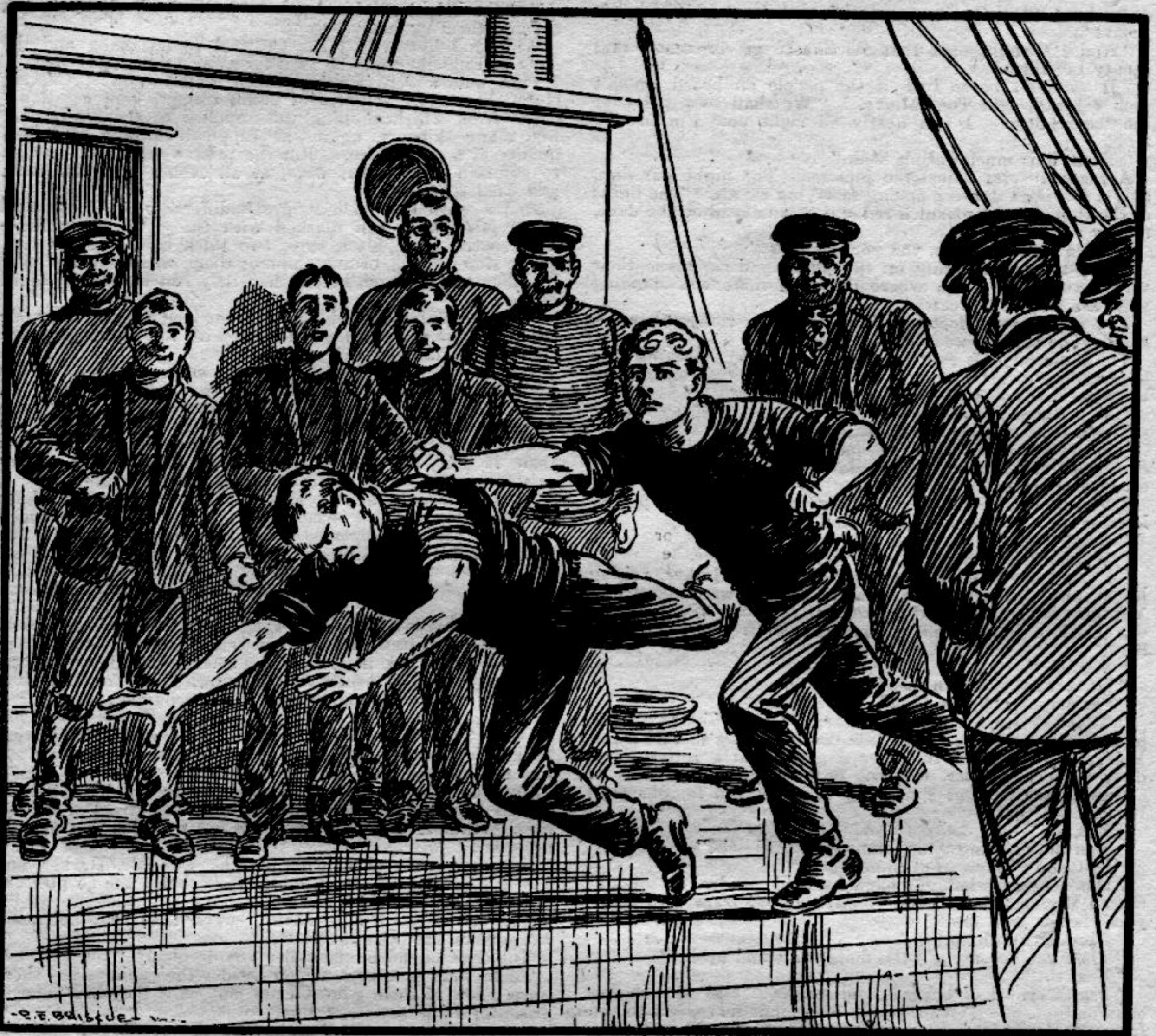
"Ay, ay, sir!"

"That's better," said Ben Hogg. "We'll make sailors of you yet, you seum!"

"We don't belong to this ship," said Tom Merry weakly. "We are schoolboys—"

"Schoolboys, are you?" said Ben Hogg, with a chuckle.

"Then if you're schoolboys, it's your place to larn, and, by



As Hookey swept by, Tom Merry's right came heavily on the side of his jaw, and Hookey went spinning. "Oh, well hit!" shouted Ben Hogg. "That was a corker! Git up, Hookey, you ain't licked yet!" (See Chapter 10.)

hockey. I'll larn yer! You belong to this craft now, howsumdever!"

"You know we're not the boys who deserted."

Hogg nodded.

"I know you ain't. But Mr. Harker don't know it—or he don't choose to know it—and the old man won't choose to know it neither, my bullies! And let me warn you that Captain Gunn is a holy terror. Mr. Harker is a gentle cherub beside him. Don't you sling him any cheek and sauce about not belonging to his ship! He'd brain you with a marline-spike as soon as look at you!"

The juniors were silent. Ben Hogg, in his rough, brutal way, seemed to be giving them a good-natured warning.

If the "old man" was worse than the chief mate, certainly the Ramchunder was a floating hell, and the prospects of the shanghaied schoolboys were not pleasant.

"You be'ave, and larn your business, and work, and you'll be all right," said Ben Hogg. "Otherwise, you'll be cut to ribbons. Savvy?"

"Weally, my deah sir——"

"And don't jaw!" said Mr. Hogg. "I'm doin' the talking. Now, if Mr. Harker catches you loafin', you'll catch something. Turn out!"

"I—I weally cannot move——"

"Halkett!" said Mr. Hogg.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said a seaman who had followed the boatswain into the forecabin with several others.

They were the watch below.

"Pitch those swabs out!"

"Ay, ay!"

Halkett grinned, and swung round to D'Arcy's bunk. Arthur Augustus made an effort to rise, but fell back and was sick. The seaman collared him, and bundled him out on deck in a quivering and gasping heap. Tom Merry and Lowther and Blake turned out of their own accord.

Blake helped Arthur Augustus up. The swell of St. Jim's was white and sick, and hardly able to stand.

"Get on deck!" said Ben Hogg. "You'll freshen up there. Kick them out!"

The juniors scrambled on deck without waiting to be kicked out, leaving the watch below grinning and chuckling behind them.

The Ramchunder, under main and topgallant and foresail, was thumping her way through a heavy sea. The Channel, seldom at rest, was very restless now, and it seemed to the juniors that a gale was blowing, as they heard the wind whistling through the cordage, and the thrashing of the bellying canvas; but it was not what a sailor would have called even a capful of wind.

The Ramchunder, however, was rolling as if she were in the midst of an Atlantic gale, and thumping on the crisping seas like a huge hammer.

Spindrift came lashing across the deck, and occasionally the brig shipped a sea, and the decks were wet fore and aft.

"Great Scott!" muttered Blake, holding on to the nearest support. "What would this rotten old tub be like in a storm?"

"I thought I was a sailah, deah boys!" groaned Arthur

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NEXT
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Augustus. "But this is wathah diffewent fwom old Conway's yacht!"

"And I thought once that I'd like to go to sea!" said Monty Lowther.

"It wouldn't be so bad if the people on board weren't such brutes!" said Tom Merry. "We shall soon get over the sea-sickness. I feel nearly all right now I'm in the air!"

"Yaas, it is much bettah beah."

A raucous voice hailed the juniors. The night was dim, only a few stars showing among scurrying clouds. The lights of the Ramchunder gleamed red and green ahead on the dark, rolling sea.

"Hallo! Tumble up, you young swabs!"

The juniors, staggering on the pitching deck, made their way towards the poop, where the chief mate was standing with the second "greaser."

The second mate looked a little less of a ruffian than his chief. The captain was not to be seen.

The juniors began to mount the poop ladder, thinking that the mate wanted them there; but Mr. Harker soon undeceived them on that point.

"Stop where you are, you dogs!"

The juniors receded to the maindeck.

"Pretty-looking set of specimens you are, ain't you?" demanded Mr. Harker, glaring down at them; and the watch on deck sniggered.

The juniors did not reply. They certainly were a pretty-looking set of specimens, if it came to that.

"Now, you, Sharpey—"

"My name isn't Sharpey, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I say your name is Sharpey!" said Mr. Harker, raising his voice. "I don't care what name you was born with! You may have changed it a dozen times—every time you got out of prison, in fact—but on board this craft you're Sharpey! See?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, what's your name?"

"Sharpey, sir, if you like."

"That's better," said Mr. Harker. "Now, Sharpey, don't let me 'ear any more about your not belonging to this craft! You're a member of the farrard gang—and a rotten, lazy, dirty, useless member, too, not fit to holystone the deck of a decent craft! But I'm going to break you in, Sharpey! Understand that!"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't bring your dunnage aboard—eh?"

"I—I don't know what dunnage is."

"Don't know what dunnage is, and you're a sailor!" roared Mr. Harker. "Did you bring your traps with you—your clothes, you fool?"

"I brought nothing."

"Then you've only got the duds you stand up in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pretty crowd of beggars and loafers!" said Mr. Harker contemptuously. "Well, you'll 'ave things served out to you from the slop-chest, and the price of the same will be docked from your pay—see?"

"Very well, sir."

"Cookey!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" said a fat, bald-headed little man, appearing from the galley.

Apparently the cook had the key of the slop-chest.

"Serve out clothes to these ragged robins, and make a note of the same!" said Mr. Harker. "See that they wash, and make themselves look less like a gang of Ratcliff Highway moochers!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"If there's half a word of sauce, you've full permission to tan their hides till they can't stand," added Mr. Harker. "Now foller the cook, you dirty seum; and if I see you lookin' any more like a gang of filthy corner-boys, by hokey, I'll make you properly sorry for yourselves!"

And the juniors followed the cook.

CHAPTER 8.

The Captain of the Ramchunder.

MORNING came up bright and sunny on the rolling Channel.

The Ramchunder, bowling and thumping away before a strong breeze, with nearly all her canvas spread, was speeding westward for the ocean.

Tom Merry & Co. had joined the last watch below, and they came on deck again in the sunny morning.

They had slept soundly for four hours, in spite of the discomfort of their surroundings, in the bunks of the four deserters, whose places and even whose names they had been compelled to take.

They were still fatigued, however, when they turned out with the port watch.

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But the bright sunshine and the keen, fresh air of the sea cheered them up immensely.

Wide and blue rolled the Channel round them, and the cliffs of England could be seen far away to the starboard.

The juniors were looking much better now. Captain Gunn, like many skippers of ocean tramps, kept a "slop" chest, from which clothing was supplied to the crew; and, like many skippers, again, he supplied clothing of a bad quality at a good price. But the juniors were glad enough to get into clothes that were, at all events, new and clean and wholesome.

And a wash had made a great difference to them, too. Their faces were still marked with the signs of conflict—they shared three black eyes, two thick ears, two cut lips, and a dozen black bruises, among them, visible to the eye; but they looked much better than they had looked the night before.

Indeed, but for the aching that remained from the terrible thrashing the mate had given them with the rope's-end, they would have felt very well indeed.

The sickness had gone; it had been caused as much by the foul closeness of the fo'c's'le as by the motion of the ship. They looked away towards the distant coast of England—Devonshire or Cornwall, as they guessed. St. Jim's was far enough away now, and it seemed farther in their thoughts than it was in reality. They had entered into a new existence, and the old one had vanished like a dream.

They wondered what the Head and the fellows would think of their disappearance—when the mystified Raggles returned with the car and reported that they had vanished. The police would be seeking for them; they would be searched for far and wide. But probably no one would guess that they had been "shanghaied" and taken to sea on an ocean tramp.

Even if Sharpey & Co. were caught—as they probably would be when they attempted to pawn D'Arcy's watch—even then, when it came out that they had changed clothes with the missing juniors, it would not be known that Tom Merry & Co. had been taken on board the Ramchunder. Even if it were guessed, nothing could be done, now that the brig was at sea. The juniors realised this very clearly. They were booked for the voyage of the Ramchunder—wheresoever she was bound—and there was no help for it.

But for the brutal surroundings, they would not have objected to such a voyage. They were not afraid of work, even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a slacker, in times of necessity.

But to pass weeks, or even months, with Mr. Harker, and a still worse skipper, in authority over them, was no pleasant prospect.

And bad as the "after-guard" were, they were not much worse than the "forward crew."

The crew of the Ramchunder was decidedly "tough."

There were nine or ten men besides the juniors, and there were a few of them who did not look as if they had been in prison at some period of their careers.

Discipline was maintained on board the Ramchunder in a way that was possibly the only way with such a crowd. An order was enforced with curses and blows if necessary.

A sullen look was sufficient to call forth a blow—and the blow would be no light one. The chief mate was powerful enough to thrash any man on board the Ramchunder. And the forward crowd knew it.

Mr. Harker was new to the brig; but he had already made the crew understand that he would stand no nonsense, as he termed it. And the rough crowd had a certain amount of admiration for the man who was rougher, stronger, and more ferocious in his temper than the worst of them; though that curious admiration did not prevent them from sullen whisperings of revenge.

Mr. Harker was not on deck when the juniors came up, the second mate being on the poop in talk with the captain. Captain Gunn was looking aloft, calculating whether the "sticks" would stand any more "muslin." Nearly all the canvas of the Ramchunder was bent and drawing; but Captain Gunn was considering whether he could pile on additional studding-sails—or stuns'ls, as sailormen call them for short.

The juniors took their rations at the galley with the rest of the watch; and the hot coffee—bad in quality as it was—made them feel better.

Then, being free for the moment from slave-driving, they considered whether they should venture to speak to the captain.

"It won't be any good," said Monty Lowther. "If we were lords and giddy dukes, I don't suppose he would stop and put us ashore. He would have to lose a fair wind—and no end of time."

"But we've a wight—" began D'Arcy.

Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, I think we ought to appeal to him," said Tom Merry. "He may set us ashore in the first port, or pass us on to some homeward-bound ship. We don't belong to his crew, and he has no right to keep us here, if he knows. We've been shanghaied, as they call it, and they can do that to sailormen without much risk, but they can't do it to schoolboys—especially St. Jim's chaps. If the skipper knew all about it, I think he'd very likely see it's too risky to keep us. He'll hear of it afterwards. If there was a prosecution over it, for instance, he would get into trouble with his owners."

"Might try him," said Blake. "But I don't like his look. He's got a jaw like a bulldog. Looks as if he might be twin-brother to old Herries's, bow-wow Towser."

"You fellows stay here, and I'll tackle him," said Tom Merry resolutely. "No need for all of us to get licked, if there's any trouble."

"Rats!" said Blake. "We'll all do it together."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sink or swim together," said Monty Lowther. "I don't think it will be any good, but we may as well try."

"Come on, then!"

And the juniors advanced, somewhat nervously, to the poop-ladder. Captain Gunn was still regarding the spars aloft. The Ramchunder was wallowing along before a stiff breeze in a heavy sea, and the captain shook his head at last, as if decided that it wouldn't do to bend the stunsails. As his glance was lowered, it fell upon the four boys standing below, waiting to catch his eye.

Captain Gunn scowled at the sight of them.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed. "Ain't there any work on this ship for ship's boys to do? Favourites of yours, Mr. Walker—eh?"

Mr. Walker, the second mate, scowled at the juniors, who had thus inadvertently brought the captain's evil temper upon him.

"No favourites of mine, sir. I'll soon set 'em to work."

"May we speak to you a minute, sir?" exclaimed Tom Merry hurriedly, as the second "greaser" came striding towards the ladder. "We don't belong to this ship, sir. We were taken on board by mistake! We are schoolboys, and—"

Captain Gunn did not seem to hear. His gaze was fixed on the bellying canvas again. It dawned upon the juniors that the skipper had been apprised by Mr. Harker of their claims, and did not choose to hear the facts. As he had no intention of parting with the shanghaied hands, probably he considered it wiser to know nothing about the matter. Before Tom Merry could proceed further, Mr. Walker reached him, and, with a savage cuff, sent him staggering across the main-deck.

Then he turned on the other juniors, and they retreated promptly. They were already learning that it was not feasible to enter into fistical encounters with officers of the Ramchunder.

Tom Merry picked himself up dazedly, and moved away with his comrades. The appeal to the captain had failed, and there was nothing more to be said or done—nothing but,

as Blake put it, to grin and bear it; or bear it even if they couldn't grin. But Hogg grinned at them as they came forrard again.

"Wot did I tell you?" he asked. "The old man is a worse terror than the greasers. You keep your tongue atween your teeth, and work 'ard, and shut up, and be civil, and you'll git on! But if you don't, my hearties, then, by the Lord Harry, I pity you!"

"We're in for it!" said Tom Merry gloomily. "We've got to stand it."

"Yaas, it wathah looks like that—and we must gwin and beah it!"

And that was what the juniors wisely resolved to do.

CHAPTER 9.

In the Atlantic.

THE chops of the Channel were left behind, and the bluff bows of the Ramchunder were bumping the rolling waves of the Atlantic. During the following day or two the juniors were gradually falling into the ways of their new life. Escape being impossible, they had ceased to think of it—until an opportunity should occur, at all events. The Ramchunder was not touching at any port for some time to come; and until she reached a port escape was evidently out of the question. The captain, they knew, had no intention of putting them on a homeward-bound vessel. The crew of the Ramchunder was short, as it was, and the boys were wanted.

They might sullenly have refused to work, but they did not. In the first place, they would have been driven into submission by merciless brutality. But, anyway, sullenness and slacking were not in their line. Although they had been shanghaied and forced on board the brig, they did not want to eat the bread of idleness, any more than they wanted to be kicked, punched and rope's-ended all day long. So they fell into the places of the absent Sharpey & Co., took their watches with the rest of the crew, devoured their bad rations with the keen appetite given by the sea air and breezes, and worked as well as they could.

And it was surprising how soon they found themselves useful.

When Tom Merry was ordered aloft to help take a reef in the mainsail, it seemed to him that he could not do it.

The mast was swaying as the vessel rolled, the sail was bellying out in the wind, the shrouds seemed like frail threads that would never hold him in the biting wind.

But Ben Hogg had already taken up a rope, ready for use. And Tom Merry knew that he had no choice.

And he had plenty of pluck.

Halkett and the rest went lightly into the rigging—it was the ordinary work of a sailorman—and if they could do it, Tom could do it.

And he clambered bravely enough into the weather-shrouds, and went up steadily, clinging fast as the wind smote him and flattened him out on the shrouds.

Blake and D'Arcy and Lowther watched him from the deck with fascinated eyes.

Once on the yard Tom Merry found his real difficulties beginning.

If he had lost his head for a single moment, he would have pitched down to sudden, cruel death on the heaving deck below, or into the racing waters beside the brig; and at the speed at which the Ramchunder was going there would have been no chance whatever of rescue.

He had had to take his life in his hand in clambering into the rigging and out on the yard, but it was no more than any sailor-boy must do. And Tom Merry did not lose his head, and he finished his share of the work, and came down with the seamen. And Ben Hogg was pleased to give him a nod of approval.

"You ain't a white-livered skunk, after all," he said. And Tom Merry felt that praise from the bullying boatswain was praise indeed.

When D'Arcy was ordered aloft for the first time, he looked despairingly at his hands. Arthur Augustus's hands were beautifully white at St. Jim's, in fact, they were things of beauty and joy for ever. But a few days on the Ramchunder had made a most alarming difference. And clinging to rough and dirty spars and rigging was likely to make matters worse. But Mr. Harker had half-raised his boot at the first sign of hesitation, and the swell of St. Jim's sighed, and clambered up into the shrouds.

To his surprise, he acquitted himself well. There was no danger unless one was afraid, and fortunately Arthur Augustus was not afraid.

He felt considerably pleased with himself, indeed, when he was down on the deck again.

Having mastered the terrors of "up aloft," the juniors were found very useful. And as every man on the Ram-

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chunder had to do the work of at least two men, as is too often the case in the merchant service, each of the boys had to do the work of at least a full-grown man. And they managed to do it somehow. Heavy sea-boots, and handspike and rope's-ends, were very powerful as persuaders.

Indeed, if their surroundings had been a little less brutal and unpleasant, the juniors would have come to enjoy the new experience.

But the Ramchunder was not a pleasant ship. The skipper was one of the old-fashioned kind, who took every opportunity of "laying his soul in soak," as Ben Hogg elegantly expressed it in the fore-castle. And when he was sober, the effects of the rum were to be seen in his temper. He bullied the men, and ragged the mates, and the latter passed it on forward, so to speak; and the seamen, ragged by the mates, indemnified themselves by ragging one another, and especially the boys. It was a case of the weakest going to the wall.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was specially the object of kindly attentions of that sort. The swell of St. Jim's irritated some of the rough hands by little elegancies of manner, and especially by his deliberate style of speech. Once upon a time it would have seemed impossible to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that a scion of his noble house could submit to the indignity of a blow. But blows were so freely given on board the Ramchunder that his noble feelings on that subject soon underwent a change.

To return to Ben Hogg's angry cuff—which he did at first—meant being half killed by the brutal boatswain, and Arthur Augustus naturally tired of that before the first few days were over.

The most troublesome fellow in the "farrard crowd" to the juniors was, however, not the boatswain, but a young hooligan named, or nicknamed, Hookey. Hookey was only a few years older than the juniors, and was not an A.B. In fact, he was, according to Ben Hogg, a slacker; and as the best of seamen could not have a peaceable life with the officers of the Ramchunder, it was evident that a slacker was booked for a terrible time.

Hookey would come into the fore-castle with a swollen nose or a black eye every now and then, and utter lurid threats of what would happen to Mr. Harker, or the "old man," before the voyage was out—threats which Ben Hogg would put a stop to with a heavy backhand when he heard them, by way of maintaining discipline.

Hookey had to take Ben Hogg's backhanders, and his consolation was to pass them on to the juniors. Tom Merry & Co. were getting used to curses, cuffs, and kicks before the Ramchunder had thumped her heavy way half across the Atlantic, but Hookey succeeded in making their lives a misery.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus one evening. "I wish old Kildare was here, to tackle that awful wottah, deah boys! He's in the galley now, and there will be anothah wow when we go in for our wations. Mr. Harkah has been waggin' him again, and it always makes him vewy unpleasant."

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"I've been thinking about that," he said. "This chap Hookey is only about eighteen. He's bigger and stronger than we are, but I've been thinking whether I couldn't tackle him."

"The other rotters would only pile on you," said Blake.

"I don't know. They're a rough crowd, but they might see fair play!" said Tom. "You know, I'm a pretty good boxer. You remember my rounds with the bantam at Wayland?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, brightening up. "Pewwaps, though, I had bettah go for the wotten boundah, Tom 'Mewwy.'"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Leave him to me, Gussy. I think I might be able to handle him, and I'm going to try. If I could lick one of the brutes, it might make the others a bit more decent. I think old Hogg will see fair play if he's there, too."

"Just as likely to rope's-end you for rowing," said Lowther.

"Well, I'll chance it."

"You feel fit?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Fit as a fiddle!"

And that was so. The hard life, the hard work, and the hard tack were hardening the juniors, and, unpleasant as their life was, they had never been more physically fit.

They went into the galley, which was small and stuffy, and crowded by the watch. Hookey was there, scowling over a pannikin of hot coffee. There was a cut on Hookey's cheek, where the chief mate's knuckles had smitten him an hour before, and Hookey's temper was vile at that moment.

"Where yer shovin' to?" he demanded, as the juniors came in.

"Weally, deah boy, we want our wations, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mildly.

"I want some coffee," said Tom Merry.

Hookey sneered.

"Want some corfee, does yer? 'Ave mine!"

And he jerked the tin pannikin forward, and the hot coffee swamped into Tom Merry's face. Tom staggered back with a gasping cry, and trod on Ben Hogg's foot, and the bo'sun gave him an angry shove that sent him spinning on the deck. Hookey burst into a loud laugh.

"Now, I'll 'ave young feller-me-lad's corfee, cooky," he said.

"No, you won't!" said Tom Merry, jumping up, and wiping the coffee from his face. "You'll have a hiding, if I can give you one."

And he ran right at Hookey, striking out.

The young ruffian jumped up, but Tom Merry's right caught him on the chin as he jumped, and he crashed over with a howl, and collapsed among the legs of the sailors. Tom Merry panted.

"Now, get up, and come on, you hound, if you want any more!" he exclaimed.

Hookey sat up dazedly.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "Crikey! I'll out yer! I'll slaughter yer! On'y you wait a minnit, till I git at yer, me beauty!"

He sprang to his feet.

Ben Hogg interposed.

"There ain't no room fur fighting 'ere," he said; "but if you want to 'ave it out, you can come out on deck."

"That bloomin' mate'll stop us!" howled Hookey.

"No, he won't!" said Ben, with a chuckle. "He likes a scrap as well as anybody. There's only Mr. Harker on the poop, and he won't interfere. Bet you on that!"

"I don't keer where it is, 'slong as I slaughter 'im!" said Hookey, with a savage look at Tom Merry.

"Kim on!" said the bo'sun.

And the whole of the watch below trooped out on deck to see the fight; and the watch on deck evinced an equal interest when they discovered what was on.

Tom Merry glanced towards Mr. Harker, on the poop; but the chief mate evidently had no intention of interfering, though he saw what was on. He was looking down towards the maindeck with an interested gaze, probably glad of a break in the monotony.

Not that Tom Merry wanted the fight to be stopped. He wanted to have it out—his blood was up—and he felt that he had a chance of licking Hookey, older and stronger as he was. And if he licked Hookey, there would be one tyrant the less in the fo'c's'le, at all events. Indeed, Tom Merry's comrades were more anxious about the tussle than Tom himself was.

Tom rolled back the sleeves of his jersey, and stood ready, and Hookey came forward to face him. There would be no rounds in that fight—no referee or timekeeper. It was a fight as long as they could stand and hit of the most rough-and-tumble character. Science would not be of so much use as brute strength and endurance. Still, it was bound to tell to a certain extent.

Ben Hogg gave the signal to start.

"You young blighters ready?"

"Yes."

"Go it!"

And they went it!

CHAPTER 10.

A Fight to a Finish.

HOOKEY started with a savage rush to get a clinch on his opponent. Then he would have punished him with fists and elbows at close quarters, and the junior would probably have been "outed" in a very short time. But Tom Merry was alert, and he did not allow Hookey to clinch with him. He gave ground, retreating round the ring made by the eager onlookers, and avoiding Hookey's savage rush. Right round the ring they went, Tom Merry back-stepping quickly, and holding his assailant off, till Hookey made a sudden, tigerish spring; and then Tom side-stepped, and the hooligan swept past him without being able to turn in time. And as he swept past, Tom Merry's right came with a crash on the side of his jaw, and Hookey went spinning.

Crash!

Hookey was down, gasping, with his hand to his jaw.

"Oh, well hit!" shouted Ben Hogg. "That was a corker! 'Ookey, ole son, what was you thinking of?"

"Grooh!" groaned Hookey.

"Git up! You ain't licked yet!"

"Git up, 'Ookey!" chorused the crew.

"I'm gittin' up, ain't I?" snarled Hookey.

His little ratty eyes were glittering at Tom Merry. He had expected the junior to fall upon him, and punch him, or drive an elbow into his ribs while he was down—that being Hookey's own method of fighting, which he intended to put into practice on this occasion if he could. But Tom Merry, though he knew what to expect himself if Hookey got a chance at him, would not do it. He could not hit a fellow when he was down.

Hookey, to his own surprise, was allowed to regain his feet at his leisure, Tom Merry waiting for him, with clenched hands and alert eyes.

"Why didn't you finish him, you young fool?" said Halkett, the bo'sun's mate. "You could 'ave outed 'im!"

Tom Merry smiled and shook his head.

"Well, you give him a chance, and he'll out you," said Halkett.

"I know he will!"

"Look out!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yaas, look out, deah boy!"

Hookey was coming on again. He came on like a whirlwind, and this time Tom Merry was not so lucky in avoiding in-fighting. Hookey got a grip on him with his powerful arms, and as Tom wrestled in his grasp, the young ruffian succeeded in driving his elbow into the junior's ribs, with a force that made Tom almost sick and dizzy. He seemed to crumple in the hands of the hooligan, and his chums were white with apprehension for him.

Hookey's hard, savage face wore a grin of malicious triumph now. He felt his enemy at his mercy, and he did not mean to show any mercy. By the time he was finished Tom Merry should be lying bruised, breathless, helpless on the deck, unable to crawl away—that was Hookey's intention.

Blows were raining on the junior, but the fight was not so near its end as Hookey supposed. Tom Merry made a desperate effort, and brought his right up with an upper-cut at close-quarters that caught Hookey under the chin. It was a fearful blow, and it seemed to Hookey as if his whole head were being knocked off upwards. He gave a gasp, and released Tom, and staggered back, dazed and half-senseless. Then crash, crash, came Tom's fists full in his face. Crash, crash again as he reeled, and he went down like a log.

Tom Merry reeled back into the arms of Monty Lowther exhausted, breathless, aching in every limb, and half-blinded by the blows that had rained on his face.

But Hookey's state was worse.

He lay palpitating on the deck, and the jeers and sneers and encouragements of the other hands alike failed to rouse him.

"Git up!" roared Ben Hogg. "You ain't finished yet, 'Ookey!"

Hookey groaned.

"I can't git up! Me jaw's fractured, I reckon!"

"I'll fracture yer neck if you don't git up!" said Hogg.

"You started this. You brought us all 'ere to see a fight, and now you ain't goin' to do us out of it! Git up, and go on, or I'll warm yer!"

"I can't, bo'sun!" groaned Hookey.

"I'll see whether you can't, my hearty!" said Ben Hogg.

And he ran towards Hookey, and began to kick him in the ribs with heavy kicks that sounded thudding across the deck.

Hookey yelled, and scrambled to his feet, reeling with weakness.

"Now will you go on?" roared Hogg.

"Yes," panted Hookey. "Leave me alone, you blighter! I'll fight 'im as long as I can stand! Ow! Let 'im kin on!"

"Forward there, you whelp!" said Ben Hogg.

Tom Merry came forward. He was not in a much better condition than Hookey, but he had another round in him yet.

"I don't want to go on, Hookey," he said.

"You'll git kicked round the deck if you don't!" snarled the boatswain. "Who's givin' orders 'ere, you whelp?"

"Kim on, durn yer!" said Hookey.

And they started again. Hookey made savage attempts to clinch, but Tom Merry held him off. Hookey went down again at last, under a terrific right-hander that almost lifted him off the deck.

Crash! And he lay where he fell.

Ben Hogg growled.

"There ain't no pluck in that soger!" he said. "Bah! Crawl away, you cowardly lubber! Git out of sight!"

And the unfortunate Hookey crawled away out of sight.

Ben Hogg turned to Tom Merry.

"You've beat 'im 'ollow," he said.

"Yes," said Tom.

"But you ain't going to put on any sorce because of that," explained the boatswain. "Take that!"

"That!" was a heavy back-hander which flung Tom Merry two or three yards away. Then the boatswain went into the galley.

Lowther picked up his chum.

"Oh!" groaned Tom Merry, pressing his hand to his head. "My hat, this is a lively ship, and no mistake! I don't think I'd mind much if she went down with all hands."

"I'd jolly well like to see it!" said Lowther viciously. "And if there's a gale, I believe she will go down. Blessed if I know how the crazy old tub has kept afloat so long!"

And he helped Tom Merry down to his bunk.

Tom Merry was utterly done, and he could hardly have reached the bunk without aid. As he lay down, Hookey's bruised, bleeding, and savage face looked at him from the opposite bunk. Hookey's face was convulsed with rage and hatred.

"I'll do for yer yet!" he muttered thickly. "You mark my words, you 'ound, I'll do for yer afore this 'ere trip is hout!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was too worn out to bandy words with Hookey; and besides, he had heard so many threats from Hookey directed towards different persons whom the hooligan disliked, that he did not attach any weight to them.

He settled himself down to rest.

But he was destined to remember Hookey's threats before long. The savage hatred Hookey had displayed towards the "old man," the mates, and the boatswain, seemed now to be transferred to Tom Merry's account, for his licking at the hands of the junior had made matters very much worse for Hookey. After that encounter he did not venture to bully or rag any of the four juniors. Tom Merry's right fist was ready for him every time.

That was a pleasure and a consolation lost to Hookey; and, besides, the other seamen took to bullying and ragging more than ever the youngest hooligan among them all, who had let himself be licked by a mere kid.

So Hookey's last state was much worse than his first, as he found out bitterly enough before another twenty-four hours had passed.

Indeed, Tom Merry's prowess had earned him a certain amount of respect among the rough crew, and many cuffs and kicks that had formerly been bestowed upon him were now bestowed upon the unlucky Hookey.

And ere long Tom Merry had reason to know that Hookey's muttered threats of vengeance were not to be disregarded.

CHAPTER 11.

The Sight of Death.

THE Ramchunder found "dirty weather" in the Atlantic.

By the time the dirty weather was encountered Tom Merry & Co. had fallen into their places as members of the crew, and were quite at home in the rigging, and, indeed, very active and useful there. It was fortunate for them, for had the rough weather come on earlier, their training would have been much more dangerous.

All the morning, now, the sky had been darkening with heavy clouds, and the wind had been growing fresher and fresher. The brig was under heavy canvas. Captain Gunn was known to be a reckless skipper, and to take great risks with his "sticks." The Ramchunder ploughed her way on through seas that were gathering in size and force every moment, and every now and then she shipped a sea that swept her fore and aft. The watch on deck were already drenched, and in savage tempers. And the captain, on the poop, was in an equally savage temper, because he saw that he must soon shorten sail, and he did not want to lose speed. He hurled swear-words of the most lurid variety at the crew when he ordered the topgallant sails to be taken in, and during the afternoon the Ramchunder thumped on under less canvas, but still under too much for safety.

The whole crew were on deck now—even the cook had come out of the galley—and all were regarding the canvas with anxious eyes.

As dusk settled down on the sea it was blowing a regular gale.

The men cursed, and muttered to one another that the "old man" would have the masts out of her; but as if he enjoyed their uneasiness, the captain gave no order for reefing the canvas. But at last even his reckless hardihood reached its limit. If sail was not taken in it would be blown clean out of the bolt-ropes, unless, indeed, the Ramchunder—as some of her crew feared—took a "header" into the boiling seas and plunged right down into Davy Jones's locker.

With a choice variety of swear-words, the skipper gave orders at last for a reef to be taken in the mainsail.

It had been left so late that it was by this time extremely perilous work. The wind was howling through the rigging, and the brig was pitching and tossing on the tumbling seas. The men who went aloft had to take their lives in their hands, and they cursed the obstinacy of the skipper that had

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exposed them to terrible and unnecessary peril. But there was no hesitation in obeying the order. The men were only too glad that the "old man" had come to his senses before it was too late.

Tom Merry was among those who went aloft, and Hookey's duty was also to go; but he was seeking to keep out of sight in the obscurity and leave his place to be taken by someone else. But the keen eye of Ben Hogg was upon him, and, with a sounding cuff, he drove the slacker to his duty.

Hookey was last on the yard.

Tom Merry, as he clung on the yard and struggled with the flapping, furious canvas, dared not look below.

The ship was rolling so heavily that half the time the yard was over a gulf of tumbling waters that seemed to leap up to receive the hardy sailormen working with the canvas.

When the yard sloped to the waves it seemed a miracle that the seamen were not tossed into the water; but they clung on like cats with hands and feet, and all the time they were struggling with the canvas.

The reef was taken in at last, and then it was time to descend—a task of equal danger and difficulty in the howling gale.

The darkness, too, added to the danger.

Tom Merry struggled after the rest to the weather-shrouds, and in the darkness he made out a dim form close to him, but did not recognise it.

The form was clinging to the shrouds without descending, and apparently holding on for a few moments to rest.

Tom Merry clambered down, and the dark figure was just above him on the ratlins, when a foot came dashing out, and the heel of the boot struck the junior fairly on the shoulder, tearing him away from his hold and hurling him backwards into space.

In that instant Tom Merry knew all—that it was Hookey just above him on the shrouds, and that the young villain had deliberately kicked him from the rigging, in revenge for the licking he had received a few days before and what had followed it. In the darkness the act could not be seen.

It passed through Tom's mind like a flash, but he had no time to think.

He shot backwards from the swaying shrouds, his hands clutching wildly at the empty air.

A cry of despair broke from his lips, and was drowned in the gale.

In that horrible instant he tasted death. He knew that nothing could save him from the awful crash upon the deck below, or the dive into the raging sea, from which he would never emerge.

Then he came to, with a sudden jerk, head downwards.

There he swung in the darkness, his head below, his feet above, and his hands clutching wildly.

His right leg was through the shrouds, and he was hanging on to a ratlin by one bent knee, and swinging in the wind as he hung.

For some moments he swung, buffeted and beaten by the wind, almost out of his senses with the horror of his position, and yet by instinct, not by thought, tightening the grip of his leg on the ratlins.

Then his clutching hands found the ratlins below him, and he held on, still head downwards on the weather shrouds, with the wind crashing at him, striving to beat him from his hold into the tossing sea.

He held on convulsively, unseen by Hookey, who was still crouching aloft, too shaken by his fearful deed to have the nerve to descend just then.

But as he felt his position secure, Tom Merry's courage and presence of mind came

back, and he slowly and carefully released his leg, and slid over to right himself, clinging on all the time with his hands, and then descended the shrouds, with beating and thumping heart, and regained the deck.

There he reeled, almost fainting from the horror of what he had been through.

"Thank goodness you've got back," Lowther muttered in his ear, grasping his arm to steady him. "My hat, you look white, Tom!"

"I've nearly been murdered," muttered Tom Merry thickly. "That scoundrel Hookey kicked me off the shrouds!"

"Oh, the villain! But you—"

"It was a miracle I wasn't dropped into the sea," said Tom.

"The hound!" muttered Lowther. "But where is he? He hasn't got down yet."

Tom Merry drew back into the shadows.

"He thinks I'm in the sea," he muttered. "I'll give the scoundrel a shock when he gets on deck."

Hookey was clambering down now.

He dropped on the deck, with a very white face, and an uneasy glitter in his little beady eyes.

"Been to sleep in the top, you lazy lubber?" hooted the bo's'un.

Hookey made no reply.

He was looking round him stealthily, still very white. Tom Merry suddenly stepped out from behind Lowther, and stood before him, where the light of a "glim" fell full upon his face.

Hookey stared at him blankly, and gave a gurgling cry.

"Oh, it's his ghost!"

"I'm not a ghost, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry.

"You tried to murder me, but you didn't succeed."

Hookey was trembling in every limb. He had not had the slightest doubt that Tom Merry's body was deep in the tossing sea, and the sight of the junior had thrown him completely off his balance. But he made an effort to recover himself as Tom spoke.

"Wotcher talking about?" he growled savagely. "I ain't touched yer!"

"You kicked me off the shrouds, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, raising his voice for all the watch to hear. "If I

hadn't caught my leg in the ratlins, I should be dead now, and you would be a murderer!"

"Wot's that?" exclaimed Ben Hogg.

Tom Merry pointed at the shrinking Hookey.

"That villain tried to kick me off the shrouds," he said.

"I never did, on my davey!" yelled Hookey. "It was the wind. I knocked agin him in coming down, that was all. He wasn't 'urt."

"Accidents will 'appen," said Ben Hogg, with a sharp look at Hookey. "But I reckermend you not to 'ave any more accidents like that, 'Ookey."

"I swear—"

"That's enough," said the bo's'un. "Call it an accident, and take that fur being a clumsy lubber, 'Ookey!"

And he dealt Hookey a blow between the eyes that sent him reeling across the deck, to collapse in the scuppers.

"And that's all about it, I suppose?" said Lowther, with blazing eyes.

The boatswain stared at him.

"Want to tell the old man?" he asked. "Go and jaw to him, and be kicked off the poop. I ain't got no objection."

"It doesn't matter," said Tom, catching his chum's arm. "I don't want to make a fuss, Monty. I shall be more careful of that rotter after this."

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

TRIED AND TRUE!

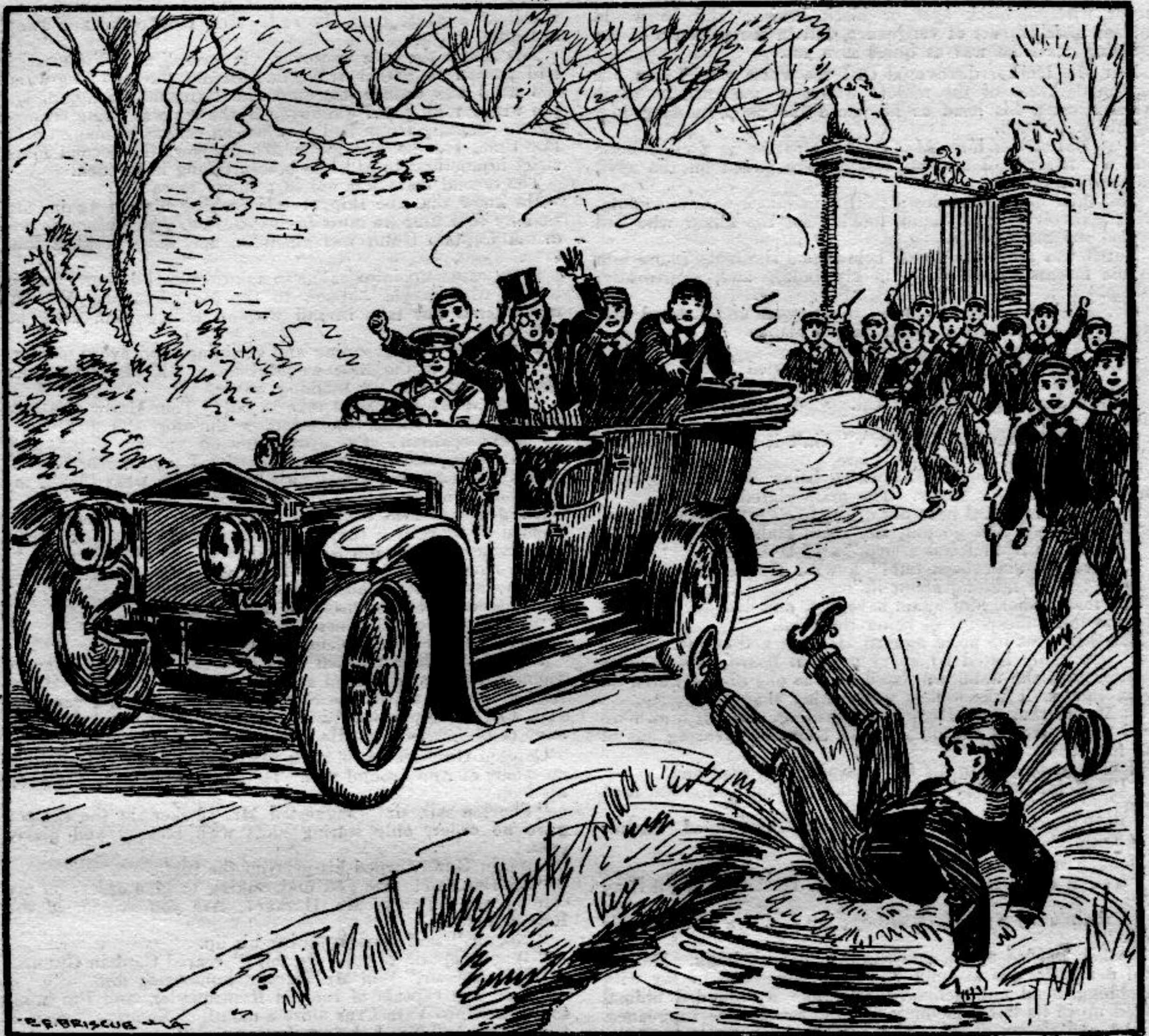
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Gran



Blake's hand came up with an egg in it, and his missile whizzed through the air. Levison gave a roar and staggered back, and, stumbling on the edge of the ditch, lost his footing, and disappeared with a loud splash!
(See Chapter 2.)

And no more was said.

The Ramchunder thumped and wallowed on under shortened sail, and all that night the storm raged, and the brig thumped and wallowed; and there was no sleep for the weary and anxious crew. When morning came up grey and dismal over the sea, it showed the Atlantic wild and tumbling, the sky grey and threatening, and the brig rolling and pitching.

CHAPTER 12. In Direst Peril!

FOR three days the gale blew, and the Ramchunder rolled and pitched under a foresail, and the crew were almost too weary to eat or sleep.

It was the hardest experience the juniors had had so far, and they were so worn out with work and watching that they fell into an almost dazed state.

Their clothes were continually wet, they had sleep in snatches, and get meals by mouthfuls, when they could get them.

The "afterguard"—the captain and mates—were in incessantly vile tempers, and their savage tempers were reflected in the fore-castle.

Never had curses and cuffs been so freely bestowed, and it seemed to the juniors as if they were in a floating den of wild beasts.

And that was not the worst, as Blake remarked, for it was quite possible that before the gale ended the den of wild beasts would be no longer floating.

The Ramchunder was an old vessel, in constant need of

repairs, and when she was repaired money was saved in every possible way, with the result that the work was "scamped" and rotten.

The juniors heard Ben Hogg expressing his opinion often enough, that it was a miracle that the rotten old tub held together in such a sea.

To add to her danger, she was overloaded, like most merchant craft; and that, added to her natural clumsiness and heaviness, placed her almost at the mercy of the waves.

Instead of riding the seas, she bumped through them, like a bull through a hedge, and many times the seamen wondered whether that plunge would be her last.

But the gale blew itself out; and the weather, though still what a landsman would have considered very stormy indeed, abated, and the fears of the crew were relieved.

The skipper had remained sober for three days and nights, and had hardly slept all the time. When the danger was over, he hastened to make up for lost time by shutting himself up in his cabin with his rum bottle, and "laying his soul in soak," according to the elegant expression of the boatswain.

Mr. Harker, who was just as worn out as the skipper, had the pleasure of remaining in charge, without the consolation of rum.

His only consolation was "hazing" the weary and ill-tempered crew, especially Hookey. Mr. Harker had a profound scorn and contempt for Hookey ever since that youth had been licked by the schoolboy. Hookey's "accident" with Tom Merry in the rigging had also reached the chief mate's ears somehow. And he was more brutal with the wretched Hookey than with any of the others. Hookey was

never without black eyes or black bruises, and he would mutter lurid threats of vengeance, but in the presence of the bullying mate he was as quiet as a cat.

But Mr. Harker discovered that the worm would turn, for in the darkness of the middle watch a marlinspike came whizzing past his head as he paced the poop, missing him by about an inch.

If it had struck him, Mr. Harker's career as a chief mate and a "hazer" of seamen would have ended on the spot, and very suddenly.

The chief mate came down to the maindeck with one jump, with a revolver in his hand, looking for the fellow who had hurled the marlinspike.

But it was Hookey's watch below, and the mate found him in the forecabin, curled up in his bunk, and, apparently, asleep.

Mr. Harker grasped him by the throat, and yanked him out of the bunk with a crash on the planks.

Hookey roared.

"Ow! Whatcher want? What's 'appened?"

"A marlinspike has happened," said Mr. Harker, shaking him as a dog might shake a rat. "You was on deck five minutes ago."

"I wasn't!" howled Hookey. "Ain't it my watch below? I been asleep fur an hour or more."

The other members of the watch below were awake now, looking out of their bunks. The mate glared at them.

"Has this gaol-bird been out of the fo'c's'le?" he demanded.

"I ain't seed him go out, sir," said Halkett.

"Sowwy, sir, but I was asleep," said D'Arcy.

"I swear I ain't been out!" howled Hookey desperately.

"I don't know nothing about it."

The mate shook him again savagely, and Hookey gurgled. He was upon the point of being throttled.

But there was no proof against Hookey, and as Mr. Harker was thoroughly hated by every man on board, it was quite possible that the unknown assailant was one of the watch on deck, though it was useless questioning them.

So Mr. Harker gave Hookey a thrashing, and left him more dead than alive on the planks, and tramped swearing out of the forecabin.

Hookey struggled to his feet, gasping and swearing.

"I'll do for 'im yet!" he gurgled. "I won't miss 'im next time!"

"Bai Jove! Was it weally you?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

Hookey snarled.

"Yes, it was. Now go and tell Mr. Harker, and I'll deny it."

"I sha'n't say a word, deah boy; but it was a wotten thing to do."

Hookey snarled again, and climbed into his bunk. He had paid dearly for his attempt upon the mate, and he lay with throbbing head and aching bones, like a wounded animal coiled up in its lair, scheming and muttering dire vengeance.

Wet and sloppy decks, and a tumbling sea and a grey sky the next morning, close-reefed sails, and slow progress, and savage tempers on all sides. But the next day the sun was seen again, and the glimmer of the sun on the sea was very cheering. Captain Gunn had hardly been seen on deck for twenty-four hours; but now he emerged with a red face and bleared eyes, shaking hands, and a tottering gait. Evidently his last wrestle with the rum bottle had been more severe than usual.

He talked to the mate in a way that the seamen enjoyed hearing, and that made Mr. Harker turn white with rage, and dig his nails into the palms of his hands.

When the skipper was recovering from a "drunk," he had a bitter tongue, and Mr. Harker had most of the benefit of it.

The chief mate went below, and the second "greaser" came in for his turn of the old man's invectives.

Then it was the turn of the watch on deck, and Captain Gunn, glaring down with bleared eyes from the poop, told them what he thought of their looks, of their seamanship, of their characters, and of the characters of their relations to the third and fourth generation.

Having relieved his feelings in that way, the skipper went below for more rum, leaving the crew wondering that the very atmosphere had not turned blue.

"There'll be trouble with the old man," said Hogg despondently. "He's always like that after a gale, and after the rum! He'll be glorious again before the dog-watch, and then you look out for squalls, my hearties!"

"And 'ere comes the gale again!" growled Halkett.

"Oh, we're going to 'ave a 'oly time across the pond, this v'yage," said Ben Hogg. "The old man will pile her up if he takes charge, you can bet on that."

"He ought to be locked up in his cabin, that's what he orter be," snarled Hookey.

"You go and turn the key!" suggested Ben Hogg, amid

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a yell of laughter from the rest. And Hookey turned away, snarling.

The lull in the gale was over. It seemed as if the weather had paused to gather strength. Before the first dog-watch the wind was thundering upon the Ramchunder again, and the weary rolling and wallowing in the sea was going on once more. Captain Gunn had crowded on canvas to make up for lost time, and he had given Mr. Walker, the second mate, strict injunctions to call him before taking in an inch.

The second mate was not in a hurry to call him.

He knew that the skipper was soaking himself again, and that by that time he must be intoxicated. And when he was drunk Captain Gunn was obstinate and more reckless than ever.

If he came up intoxicated to take command there was no telling what might happen to the Ramchunder. Yet the mate dared not take in sail without telling him, after his orders.

The masts were groaning and straining, and every moment it looked as if the brig would take a "header," and disappear for ever in the foaming waves.

"Why doesn't the idiot take in sail?" Tom Merry muttered desperately. "Either the masts or the ship will go!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm afwaid it's all up this time!" said Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove! I wish we had nevah gone on that blessed motah twip! I wondah what they'll say at St. Jim's?"

St. Jim's seemed centuries behind the juniors now. It seemed to them as if they had always been ship's boys, amid the savage and squalid surroundings of the ocean tramp.

Ben Hogg ventured at last to speak to Mr. Walker.

"She won't stand much more, sir," he said.

The second greaser answered with a curse.

"Mind your own business, blank you!"

And Hogg cursed, too, under his breath.

But Mr. Walker realised that it would not do, for every moment the canvas looked as if it would be blown to tatters. And at last he called the chief mate. Mr. Harker came on deck, and swore profoundly, and agreed that the skipper would have to be fetched up. He called the skipper himself.

Captain Gunn came on deck, with a purple face, breathing an odour of rum around him. He held on to the rail to keep his feet.

"Shorten sail, sir?" suggested Mr. Harker, as the skipper gave no order, only staring aloft with bleared and glassy eyes.

Captain Gunn turned his eyes on the mate.

"Shorten sail! Are you undertaking to give orders on my ship in my presence, Mr. Harker? Are you skipper of the Ramchunder?"

"No, sir," said Harker, biting his lip.

"Who's captain of this 'ere ship?" roared Captain Gunn.

"You are, sir," said Mr. Harker, humouring him.

"Yes, I'm captain of the old Ramchunder, and I'm goin' to get her into Vera Cruz afore a month of Sundays," snarled the skipper. "No, I sha'n't shorten sail!"

"But, sir—"

"You hear me, Mr. Harker?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Hold your tongue!"

The chief mate ground his teeth, and stepped back. Captain Gunn held on to the rail and surveyed the anxious faces on the maindeck.

"Ha, ha! Skeered of a capful of wind, are ye, ye sloppy, lubbery swabs! I'll teach you! I'll sail my ship under full canvas, if I sail her to Davy Jones! And I'll like to see the man that won't obey my orders! Let him come out!"

Nobody spoke.

But the looks of the seamen grew blacker and blacker as the gale howled through the rigging, and the canvas strained and groaned.

Suddenly, high aloft, there came a report like a pistol-shot as the top-gallant sail was blown clean out of the bolt-ropes, and disappeared like a bird in the air.

Ben Hogg gritted his teeth.

"The top-gallant's gone, and we'll be going soon!" he muttered.

The skipper stared aloft with drunken gravity. Mr. Harker ventured to approach him once more.

"The foresail will go, sir—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"By gosh, I won't hold my tongue!" shouted the exasperated mate. "If you don't shorten sail, sir, I'll undertake to give orders myself."

The skipper glared at him. There was a murmur of approval from the crew. If the mate gave orders they were ready to obey them at once. The responsibility of mutiny would be upon Mr. Harker's shoulders. And mutiny, even against a drunken captain determined to sail his ship to destruction, is a very serious matter at sea.

The skipper pointed with a shaking hand at the enraged mate.

"Put that man in irons!" he exclaimed, in a choking voice.

Not a man stirred.

Mr. Harker turned his back on the skipper, and shouted to the men.

"Look alive there! Hands aloft to take in sail!"

And there was a rush to obey.

CHAPTER 13.

To Save His Enemy.

CAPTAIN GUNN stood on the poop, staring stupidly at the seamen as they rushed aloft in obedience to the chief mate's order.

He did not seem to realise for the moment that his authority was being disregarded, and that he was being set aside by his second in command.

The seamen were aloft in a twinkling, spread out over the yards, and the mate watched them with anxious eyes, fearing that he had taken the law into his own hands too late.

The ship was pitching wildly under her load of canvas, little relieved by the blowing away of the top-gallant. But for the fact that the top-gallant had parted, the Ramchunder would probably have been bows under by that time.

Tom Merry & Co. had remained on deck. They had been quite willing to take their share of the work. But in that tearing wind stronger hands were wanted, and Ben Hogg had ordered them to remain.

The boatswain himself was one of the men spread out on the yards.

"By gosh!" stuttered Captain Gunn. "By gosh! Who's the skipper of this old hooker, Mr. Harker?"

The mate did not reply.

His very heart was in his eyes as he gazed aloft. If the order to shorten sail had come too late nothing could save the Ramchunder.

The obstinacy of the drunken captain, which had often before been carried to the very verge of disaster, would have passed the verge this time.

Would the masts hold?

The topmasts were bending like whipcord before the gale.

The mainmast itself was groaning and straining, as if it would be torn bodily from its hold in the very heart of the ship.

"Oh, that mad idiot!" Jack Blake muttered. "If the mast goes, what of the men aloft?"

Would the masts go?

Captain Gunn held on to the rail, and raved to the men aloft.

"Down with you! Down with you, every mother's son of you! I'll have you all flogged for mutiny! I'll have you put in goal, every manjack of you! I'll stop your grog for the rest of the voyage! Down with you!"

But the seamen did not even hear him in the roar of the gale. And they would have taken no notice if they had heard.

They had their hands full struggling with the canvas.

Tom Merry uttered a sudden cry.

"Good heavens! It's going!"

Crack! Crash!

The topmast smashed like a stick, and came down, only the rigging holding it to the ship and preventing it being blown away like a feather on the gale.

The foretopmast followed in a twinkling, and a mass of wrecked spars and rigging came hampering down on the Ramchunder's bows.

There were loud cries from the seamen aloft.

But their voices were drowned in the gale. The foreyard was over the side, and two men who had been at work on it had disappeared into the raging waters.

The captain stood holding on to the rail, too stupefied to speak or move. From the two mates came a stream of oaths.

Men were struggling, entangled in the rigging. But the wild pitching of the brig had abated a little, now that she was relieved of most of her canvas. The loss of the masts had helped her; but the two topmasts were hanging over the side now, held on by the rigging, and they thumped away at the side of the ship with every heave of the sea. The crashes sounded like blows of a giant hammer.

"Cut it away!" yelled the mate.

He came leaping down to the maindeck with an axe in his hand. Bully and brute as he was, he did not lose his presence of mind for a second, and at that moment of fearful peril he showed up at his best.

The mainyard was still intact, and men were clinging to it. All but two scrambled back to the deck—by a miracle, as it seemed. But two members of the Ramchunder's crew would never answer the call of their names again.

While the drunken captain stood dazed on the poop, the

two mates and the seamen worked away fiercely, slashing at the rigging that held the broken topmasts to the ship.

Until the hamper was cut away the Ramchunder had no chance.

The beating of the broken spars on the side of the brig would not be long in staving in the timbers, and once there was a leak in the rotten old fabric all was over.

The four juniors were as quick as anyone in rushing to work.

The axes and knives were very busy, slashing through ropes and knots, and at length the foretopmast was cut loose, and it disappeared on the crest of a wave.

The maintopmast was still grinding on the timbers of the Ramchunder, and great seas were breaking over the brig.

The hatches had been battened down, or the brig would have filled and sunk. The seamen worked knee-deep in water, and sometimes a great sea broke over them and swamped them to their necks.

They had to cling to the wreckage as they slashed at it to save themselves from being carried away by the wild waters.

"Stand clear!" the chief mate shouted suddenly.

The wreckage was going. The last strands were parting like pistol-shots, and the men scrambled back to avoid being carried away in the tangled ropes.

There was a fearful yell in the roar of the waters.

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

In the dimness hardly anything could be seen, but the crew knew the voice of Hookey.

"Stand clear, you fool!" shouted the mate.

"'Elp!"

Tom Merry dashed the water from his eyes, and stared towards the shrieking voice. He could see nothing.

Crack—crack—crack!

The last ropes that held the floating mast were cracking one by one. It was like a succession of reports of fire-arms.

And amid the cracking of the last ropes and the roar of the sea came that shrieking, terrified voice:

"'Elp! 'Elp! I'm caught! 'Elp!"

"He's caught in the rigging!" said Blake, with chattering teeth. "Tom Merry—Tom—where are you going?"

Tom Merry did not reply; he did not even hear.

He knew what had happened to Hookey. The wretched lad had become entangled in the torn ropes, and he could not extricate himself. He was being dragged overboard. When the last strand that held the floating mast to the ship had parted, Hookey would be whirled away—to death in the wild waters.

Tom Merry plunged forward, axe in hand.

He caught a dim sight of a white, terrified face, and hands clinging to the rail. Hookey was already over the side, and the tangled ropes round his body were dragging him to death.

Tangled ropes were round him as he hung there, and twisted over the deck in the swirling water. To venture near him now was to risk being caught by a similar fate. For one moment Tom Merry hesitated. This was the enemy who had made a cowardly attack upon him aloft—who had sought to hurl him to death in a stormy sea. Why should he risk his life to save him?

But the hesitation was only for a moment.

He ran on, stumbling and reeling on the pitching deck. He lost his footing, and brought up in the scuppers with a thud, with the water swirling over him. He scrambled up, his hands clutching at ropes. The white face of Hookey was close to him.

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

"I'll help you!" panted Tom Merry.

He had retained his grip on his axe, in spite of his fall. He raised it, and lashed at the ropes that tangled round Hookey.

The axe slipped from his hand, as he was caught and whirled over by a heavy sea, and disappeared. The wave passed. Hookey was still holding on, but he was exhausted.

"I'm a goner!" Tom Merry heard him say. "I'm done!"

"Hold on!" shouted Tom.

He opened his clasp-knife, and slashed desperately at the ropes. Hookey gave a sudden yell of delight.

"I'm clear! I'm clear!"

Tom grasped him, and dragged him in. With a last crack, the last of the detaining ropes parted, the torn rigging whisked overboard like serpents, whirling round the two as they held on, but fortunately not entangling them.

The Ramchunder, relieved of the encumbrance, righted.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"TRIED AND TRUE!"

Hookey gave a groan, and fainted in Tom Merry's grasp. The strain had been too much for him.

Monty Lowther and Blake came to their chum's help, and Hookey was dragged into the fore-castle, and lifted into his bunk. There they left him. There was no time to trouble about him further. They hurried on deck, knowing only too well that it was touch-and-go with the old Ramchunder, and that the chances were that the dismasted and disabled old ocean tramp would never see the light of morning.

CHAPTER 14.

To the Rescue!

ALL through the night the gale raved and roared over the tossing sea.

Captain Gunn had gone below.

He was solacing himself in his cabin with his rum-bottle, leaving the two mates to command the brig.

Not a soul on board the Ramchunder thought of sleep. They were only too near the last long sleep.

The loss of the topmasts had relieved the brig, and not a rag of canvas was showing now, as she plunged on through the foaming seas.

While the wreckage had clung to her, she had turned almost gunwale under, the seamen fearing every moment that she would turn turtle.

Now that the wreckage was cut away, she had righted, but not quite. She was swamping through the seas with a heavy list to starboard, and for a time the men feared that she had sprung a leak. But it was not a leak—at all events, not a serious one. Word was soon passed round among the dismayed crew that the cargo had shifted.

While the brig had lain almost on her beam-ends the cargo had shifted, and it was not likely to settle again.

The brig thumped on through the waters, with her deck sloping down to starboard so steeply that it was impossible to keep a footing upon it without holding on.

When she rolled to port she came almost level; when she rolled to starboard, she went down so low that the crew's heart were in their mouths lest she should turn completely over—turn turtle, as the sailormen express it.

And there were no signs of the gale going down.

The mates were seen to consult sometimes, with anxious faces, but what they said could not be heard. The skipper remained below.

The crew hung on to ropes and stanchions, and cursed sullenly when they had breath enough.

To most of them it seemed pretty certain that the end had come. The Ramchunder was in no state to live through such a gale at the best of times, and the skipper's drunken obstinacy had destroyed what chance she had.

Yet hour after hour the brig thumped and laboured on, at the mercy of the sea.

Seas broke right over her deck as she rolled and swept her fore and aft.

It was near midnight when the carpenter clambered up to the poop with a scared face, and made an announcement that brought a fresh stream of lurid language from Mr. Harker.

"What's the mattah, sir?" Arthur Augustus bawled in the ear of Ben Hogg, overcoming his dislike and dread of the boatswain in his anxiety to know what the danger was.

The boatswain cursed volubly.

"A leak, o' course!" he replied.

"And the pumps jammed, you bet!" shouted Halkett furiously. "I know them pumps—the pumps of this old coffin! We're doomed, that's wot we are!"

"There's the boats!" said Tom Merry.

The boatswain snorted.

"The boats in such a sea as this! You're mad!"

Tom Merry glanced at the sea, and his heart sank. Truly, there did not seem much chance of a boat surviving in that maddened whirl of waters. But the Ramchunder was filling under their feet!

Some of the men received the news with sullen resignation, too drenched and cold and weary to care. Some of them burst into savage execrations. Hookey, who had come out of the fore-castle, yelled out that if they were drowned, they might as well drown drunk as sober. The suggestion caught on at once, and there was a rush aft, which was met by the chief mate with a revolver in his hand.

"Back forrard!" he said, showing his teeth in a snarl like a wild animal.

And the crew surged back from the levelled six-shooter and the glittering eyes behind it.

The captain was seen on the poop again now. The calamity that had overtaken his vessel seemed to have had the effect of sobering him to some extent, but he was still in a dazed state. He did not speak, but held on to the rail, gazing before him with stupid eyes. The command was in the hands of the chief mate, but there was little that Mr.

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Harker could do save to keep the crew back from the rum. That would have been the finishing stroke to the disaster.

"Will it never be morning?" muttered Tom Merry wearily.

How long was that black night of danger and horror to last? When dawn came, help might come with the daylight. If the Ramchunder was sighted in her helpless state, any other vessel would do all that was possible to aid, though it was doubtful what could be done in such a sea.

But there were long hours of darkness before the hapless crew yet, with the ship under their feet leaking, and taking ever and ever a greater list to starboard, till it seemed a miracle that she did not turn turtle at every plunge in the seething waves.

Mr. Harker ordered the pumps to be rigged, and the seamen pumped wearily, without hope. The pumps jammed, as Halkett had foretold. The Ramchunder was badly found in every respect, and the pumps were as rotten as the rest of her outfit. Indeed, Tom Merry, who had looked at her boats, was in doubt whether they would live in a much calmer sea than that which was now running.

Suddenly, from the darkness of the wild sea, came a gleaming light.

Ben Hogg gave a shout.

"A steamer, by thunder!"

Hope flushed into every face then.

A great ship, lighted up like a theatre, had loomed out of the gloom of darkness and death, as though the hand of Providence had been stretched forth in the hour of despair to save them.

"A liner, by Jove!" said Tom Merry.

"What luck, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus through his chattering teeth. "I wondah if they can take us off, though?"

"It's our only chance, anyway."

Mr. Harker, with hope in his face, too, ordered flares to be burnt as a signal to the steamer.

It could be seen that the great ship had stopped on her course. She had sighted the helpless brig rolling in the trough of the sea, and was coming to her aid.

But how to aid?

The bravest seamen might have shrunk from launching a boat in the sea that was running almost in mountains between the two vessels. But there is no danger at sea from which British seamen will shrink in attempting to save those in distress. Every man on the Ramchunder knew that, whatever the peril, the steamer's crew would do all that could be humanly done.

Mr. Harker rapped out an order for the longboat to be lowered.

The steamer was standing by to receive them, and there was nothing for it but to make an attempt to reach her in the boats. The Ramchunder might disappear under their feet at any moment.

Then followed one of the incidents only too common with ill-found ships—the longboat went down by the head as the rotten tackle gave, and plunged under the water, hanging on by the stern falls. A wave dashed her against the Ramchunder, and the splinters of the boat disappeared in the froth of the sea.

There were two other boats—smaller skiffs—and each in turn was lowered. One of them was smashed at once against the brig, the other floated, and half a dozen men piled into her with the second mate, and pulled off. There was not room in the boat for more, and the others had to wait their turn. The risk of going in the cockleshell, dancing on the waters, was almost as great as that of remaining on the sinking ship, and no one was very keen to go, so there was no rush for places. The men whom the mate had ordered into the boat went quietly and sullenly, that was all.

The mate had taken the rudder, and six men bent to the oars. In the flare of the lights burnt by both ships the crew of the Ramchunder—those who remained on the brig—watched the progress of the boat.

The men of the big steamer were standing ready to receive the boat, to do all they could to help the refugees on board. The boat laboured on, sometimes mounting the crest of a huge wave, sometimes disappearing from sight in the trough of the sea. Every time she disappeared it seemed that she would never reappear; but again she came up, still floating, and gaining foot by foot towards the waiting liner.

"Bai Jove! She's there!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

A great wave caught the boat, and dashed her right on to the steamer.

Through the roar of the storm the crash could be heard as the boat was smashed to atoms on the metal plates.

But lines had been thrown, and the wrecked crew were clambering on board. Not one of them went down. More dead than alive, they were dragged on the liner.

But the boat was under the water in fragments.

"They'll have to send one of their boats for us, or we're done for!" Blake muttered.

"They'll try!" said Tom Merry confidently.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was no doubt about that. Fearfully dangerous as such an attempt was, it was quite certain that the steamer's crew would make it.

And the remaining hands on the Ramchunder gave a feeble cheer as a boat dropped from the steamer and fended off, and the sturdy seamen pulled for the wrecked brig.

CHAPTER 15.

Too Late!

TOM MERRY & CO. watched the oncoming boat with bated breath.

On the Ramchunder now remained only nine persons—the captain, the chief mate and the boatswain, the four juniors, the cook, and Hookey. They were all on deck, and watching the boat with intense gaze.

The Ramchunder's boat had barely succeeded in reaching the steamer, and had there been dashed to pieces. The steamer's boat had to make the journey and return if the attempt was to be successful. It seemed too much to expect.

But the seamen came steadily on.

Closer and closer to the rolling, thumping brig—lifted now on a high wave and looking as if it would swoop down on the deck of the Ramchunder, sunk now in a deep abyss, seemingly about to be overwhelmed by the curling seas. Still the boat fought and struggled on.

One man was baling incessantly, but the boat was swimming with water.

But still it drew nearer.

Close at last, under the lee quarter of the rolling Ramchunder—closer it could not come without courting destruction.

The mate in charge of the boat stood up and shouted:

"Jump!"

Jump! With twenty feet of raging water between them and safety, between the rolling brig and the dancing, tossing boat!

It seemed like jumping to certain death.

"I ain't going!" growled Hookey between his teeth. "I'll stick to the Ramchunder as long as she floats! I ain't goin' to commit suicide—not me!"

"Jump, you cowardly scum!" roared Mr. Harker.

"Get a line to the boat, sir!" said Ben Hogg. "I'll jump first, and take a line."

"Ay, ay!"

And, with a rope tied to his belt, the burly boatswain plunged into the water, and a minute later was dragged into the boat.

The line was made fast, and, with the assistance of the line, and encouraged by the boatswain's example, the cook followed.

The anxious, straining eyes on the brig watched the cook dragged, half-senseless, into the boat.

Then a wave swept on the boat, and the line, strong as it was, snapped like a fiddle-string and parted.

The boat, struggling for life in the wild waters, was swept back from the brig, and at the same moment there came a yell from Mr. Harker:

"Jump, and chance it! She's going!"

And the chief mate threw himself into the sea.

The Ramchunder had taken the last plunge at last. The list to starboard had told fatally, and, as she rolled deep in the trough of the sea, she fairly turned turtle.

The juniors were together, and they had intended to stick together if they could, but at that moment they were swept apart.

Tom Merry caught an arm as he was swept away—it was Lowther's arm—and he clung on to it unconsciously.

What was happening? He hardly knew. He only felt that he was being engulfed in a pandemonium of waters. Then his hand left the arm he was holding. He clutched at anything—everything. Something came into his grasp, and he caught it. He did not know what. And he was holding on—clutching—clutching for dear life!

Waters round him, boiling and seething and thumping. A roar in his ears, darkness over his vision, despair in his heart, mixed with wild anxiety for his comrades. Still his hands were clutching, and he felt himself climbing, clambering upon something that gave him support from the wild waters.

He freed one hand, and gouged the water from his eyes.

Where was he?

What was the huge mass that floated under him, in black darkness, with the white-frothed waters foaming round.

He reached it at last.

It was the hull of the brig. The Ramchunder had turned completely over, and was floating with her keel in the air,

and Tom Merry was clambering up the inverted hull—clambering till he reached the very keel, and clung there.

High out of water the hull rose now. The stumps of the masts were below the sea, pointing towards Davy Jones's Locker, pointing the way the survivors must soon go, as he felt bitterly enough.

He tried to look round him, but all was darkness.

Far in the distance gleamed the lights of the steamer.

But where was the boat?

The boat? After seeing the brig turn turtle, the seamen were not likely to remain near her. They could not have a suspicion that a survivor was clinging to the upturned keel in the deadly darkness. And even if they knew it, they could not reach him. But they did not know it. They had done all they could. And Tom Merry realised, with a deadly sickness of despair in his heart, that the boat was pulling away in the darkness towards the steamer.

He was lost!

He felt for a moment that he did not care. Where were his chums—Monty Lowther, and Jack Blake, and D'Arcy? Where were they? Swept away to death—leaving him to die but a little later! If they were gone, what did it matter if he followed?

He clung on the keel and shouted.

"Lowther! Blake! D'Arcy! Answer me if you are alive! Is anybody here beside me?"

"Tom!"

It was Lowther's voice, shouting back from the darkness. Tom Merry gave a joyful cry, and clambered along the keel to where his chum was clinging.

Lowther's white, wet face glimmered in the gloom.

"Monty—oh, Monty, you're here, at least!"

"You haven't seen Blake or Gussy?"

"No!"

"They're gone!" said Lowther, with a shudder.

"Shout to them. They may hear; it's possible!"

The two chums shouted again and again. But no answer came back save the sullen boom of the sea.

They ceased at last, in despair.

"They may have been picked up by the boat," said Lowther, with a faint hope.

"It's barely possible."

"Where is the boat, Tom?"

"Gone!"

"Gone!" groaned Lowther.

"Yes. When the brig turned over, they couldn't have any hope of saving any more. They're gone! They'd have heard us shout if they were near. Besides, they were burning a light. There's no light on the sea now! They're gone!"

"Heaven help us!"

"And the steamer's going!" muttered Tom.

They stared through the darkness towards the distant lighted ship. The lights were disappearing as the great ship swept away into the night.

They shouted wildly, but the howl of the wind drowned every cry.

Smaller and fainter grew the lights of the steamer.

Then they vanished.

Darkness lay upon the waters, broken only by the fitful gleaming of the foamy crests of the waves.

Drenched to the skin, weary, despairing, the two survivors of the wreck clung to the keel of the overturned Ramchunder.

The wrecked brig still floated.

In her hold the air was pent up, and probably that, to a certain extent, kept her afloat; and her cargo perhaps aided. At all events, she floated, as ships will sometimes do after turning turtle—much to the danger of other ships that come upon them in the darkness.

Round the floating hulk the waves were buffeting; but it seemed to the juniors that the force of the gale was dying away. It was as if the storm-fiend felt that he had done his worst.

It seemed ages ere a pale glimmer of light showed in the eastern sky.

Dawn at last!

The sun came through the thick grey clouds; it glimmered with pale rays upon a foaming, tumbling sea, and a floating wreck upon which two ghastly figures clung.

The juniors swept the sea with their weary eyes as the light strengthened.

But there was no sail in sight; no smoke of a steamer. They were alone upon the bosom of the waste Atlantic.

"If only Blake and Gussy were here," groaned Tom Merry, "I'd not complain of anything else. The old hulk is going to float."

"And there's a chance of being picked up," muttered Lowther. "The gale's almost gone."

"If only they were here!"

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There were bitter tears in the eyes of the two juniors. The danger they were in was nothing, if only their chums had been with them. The chance that Blake and D'Arcy had been picked up by the steamer's boat was infinitesimal, though they clung to it. It seemed only too certain that their comrades had found a resting-place beneath the grey, rolling waters.

The sun strengthened, and the rays brought a comforting warmth to the juniors. The sea was rapidly going down, and on their perch on the Ramchunder's keel they were twenty feet out of the water. Their clothes began to dry. And now the pangs of hunger began to assail them.

"We must have food, Monty," said Tom Merry, at last. "Do you think we could hack a hole in this rotten timber?"

"It's our only chance, Tom. I've got a knife!" said Lowther. "My hat! I never thought the time would come when I should be glad that the Ramchunder was a rotten old tub and half-eaten by worms! But it's a stroke of luck now!"

The juniors scrambled over the hull, looking for the rottenest spot. Tom Merry started with his clasp-knife, hacking at the rotten timber. His blows brought a hollow echo from within the hold.

Suddenly he paused, his hand in the air, his face fixed and startled.

"Good heavens, Monty!"

"What—"

"Listen!"

Knock! Knock! Knock!

As if in answer to Tom Merry's blows upon the hull, there came three steady knocks from within the hold of the Ramchunder!

CHAPTER 16.

From the Jaws of Death.

TOM MERRY, with a trembling hand, knocked on the timber again with the haft of his knife.

From below the answer came back:

Knock! Knock! Knock!

There was no doubt about it. Tom Merry's eyes blazed; his breath came almost in sobs. There were survivors within the floating hull! Survivors—and whom? Only the juniors, Hookey, and the captain had been on board the Ramchunder still when she took her final plunge. And the captain, dazed by drink, could hardly have survived. There were survivors, shut up in the hold of the floating wreck—Blake, D'Arcy, or Hookey—probably all of them—possibly, at least. And the thought that their chums were living, that they would see them again, gave new life to Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Oh, this is ripping—ripping!" Lowther muttered.

"It seems too good to be true!" Tom Merry said, with a choke in his voice. "It—it may not be them; but I hope—Cut away, Monty."

"Yes, rather."

The juniors hacked away desperately at the timber.

Rotten the timber certainly was, with patches that it seemed marvellous had not given way to the sea and leaked long ago. But the timber, all the same, offered a stout resistance to the wretched implements the juniors had to use. They had nothing but their clasp-knives.

But they worked with feverish energy, fatigue and danger forgotten.

Once the survivors were extricated from the hold of the Ramchunder, there was a chance of life. A raft might be built before the brig took her final plunge, and stocked with food from the interior of the brig. And the sea was growing calmer now with every minute that passed. The gale had fairly blown itself out at last.

Hack! Hack! Hack!

From below came the sounds of incessant knocking. Whoever was below was aiding in the work of hacking through the timber.

Suddenly there was a gleam of steel under Tom Merry's eyes, and he saw the edge of an axe emerge.

Whoever was inside the hull was better provided with an implement than the juniors outside.

The axe edge quivered through the wood, and was withdrawn. And Tom Merry and Lowther worked away from the gash, enlarging it, and chipping away the wood in great splinters, thinning it down to render it more vulnerable to the blows from below.

Crash, crash, crash! came the axe again, and huge splinters came out. The sun was past the meridian; the juniors had been working for long, long hours, without noticing the passage of time, without remembering that they were hungry and fatigued.

The hole was clear through the timber now—an inch

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across, several inches long—and Tom Merry paused in his labour and called out.

"Who is below there?"

A joyful voice answered.

"That you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Blake! It's you Blake?"

"Yes. Have you seen anything of Lowther?"

"He's here with me."

"Good egg!"

"But Gussy—"

"Gussy's with me," said Blake, "spoiling his beautiful hands hacking at this rotten timber. He forgot his gloves when the ship turned over."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Lowther. They could afford to laugh now.

"Weally, Blake—" came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Anybody else there, Blake?"

"Yes—Hookey."

"And the captain?"

"Haven't seen anything of him."

"The old man's 'ad 'is last drunk, this v'yge," said the voice of Hookey. "I reckon the fishes know the flavour of rum by this time."

"That is wathah an unfeelin' wemark, Hookey. Pway shut up!"

"Thank goodness you're there, you fellows!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "We—we were afraid you were gone."

"We felt the same about you chaps," said Blake. "I never dreamed you'd be hanging on to the keel. You can imagine what I felt like when I heard knocking."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How on earth did you get there?" asked Monty Lowther.

Blake chuckled.

"I'm blessed if I know," he said. "I was washed away by the water when the old tub took a dive and swept below. I was hanging on to Gussy, and Hookey was hanging on to my leg. When we were swept into the hatchway I thought we were going to be drowned like rats in a trap—or, rather, I felt it. I didn't have any time for thinking. Then we were in the dark—shut up here—not knowing how it had happened; but here we were, expecting to go down every second, and Hookey howling and swearing, and Gussy and I trying to take it as calmly as we could—and then I think I went to sleep a bit."

"You were certainly snorin', deah boy."

"Then we heard your knocking," said Blake, "and it seemed like a chance. I found I still had the axe in my belt that I'd been cutting rigging away with before, and it came in jolly useful. That's all."

"Have you got any grub there?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No; but Hookey's been gorging while we've been working, so I suppose he's found his way to the grub."

"Easy as winking," said Hookey; "the cargo's all shifted. But you kin crawl aft to the lazarette, and get at the cabin stores."

"Get us some biscuit while we hammer away," said Lowther.

"Get it, Hookey," said Blake.

"I ain't obeying your horders!" said Hookey.

"Ain't you?" said Blake pleasantly. "Do you want to be left in here when we get out? As there are four of us, and only one of you, I think you'd better obey orders, and be glad of the chance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Hookey seemed to think so, too, for he growled, and crawled away in the darkness. The juniors resumed their work. They hammered and hacked at the hole in the timber, and it grew larger and larger. By the time Hookey returned with a bag of captain's biscuits the hole was large enough to pass the biscuits through, and Blake passed them up singly to the two juniors outside the hull.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther hardly realised how hungry they were until they began to eat. Then they devoured the biscuits with almost ravenous keenness.

Then they worked again.

The hole in the timber grew larger and larger as the afternoon wore on. Above the juniors was now a blue sky, and the sun was decidedly warm. Blake passed up from below a bottle of mineral water that Hookey had brought from the cabin stores, and Tom and Monty drank it gladly. Hunger satisfied, thirst had followed. The opening in the planks was large enough at last for Blake to put his head through.

Gladly the junior put out his head, and drew in deep breaths of the keen sea air.

"Jolly thick down below," he remarked. "This is better! We should have been suffocated long before this if we hadn't made that opening."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm feeling quite headachy!"

Blake withdrew his head.

"A bit more, and we can get out," he said.

And, heedless of the fatigue that ached in their weary arms, the juniors resumed their work, Hookey taking his turn much against his will. The hole grew larger, and Blake was able to get his shoulders through. He clambered out on to the sloping hull with the assistance of the juniors outside.

"Now, Gussy——"

"Lend me a hand, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus was dragged up through the opening. Hookey was helped out after him. D'Arcy fumbled in his clothes for his eyeglass—that precious relic of his former life, which he had preserved through all dangers. He jammed it into his eye, and surveyed his friends and himself.

"Bai Jove! We do look a feahful cwovd of scarecrows!" he ejaculated.

"Yes; I don't think anybody would take you for the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's now!" chuckled Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"St. Jim's!" said Lowther. "I wonder whether we shall ever see it again?"

"Of course we shall," said Tom Merry cheerily. "After what we've been through, we can't grumble now. There's plenty of stuff here to make a raft, as soon as we've had a rest, and lots of stores inside the hulk that we can get at. And the gale's gone."

"Yaas, wathah! I must wemark that we are wathah in luck."

"I reckon we've got the free run of the stores now, and we can git suthin' to cheer ourselves up with," said Hookey; and he drew a bottle from inside his jersey. "Will you 'ave a taste of this?"

"No, thanks!" said Blake.

"Weally, Hookey, you would be much wisah to let that beastly wum alone."

Hookey grinned, and took a pull at the bottle.

His face was already flushed, and he was evidently under the influence of previous swigs from that bottle. Tom Merry's eyes glinted. The skipper's drunkenness had brought destruction on the Ramchunder, and caused mischief enough; but Tom Merry did not intend to be troubled by the same vice in Hookey. He caught the rum bottle from Hookey's hand, and flung it as far as he could into the sea.

Hookey uttered an exclamation of rage.

"Wot! Crikey! I'll——"

"You'll keep sober, you fool!" said Tom Merry sternly. "How do you think you'll hold on here when you're drunk? Do you think we're going to waste time looking after a drunken brute when we've got our lives to save?"

Hookey clenched his hands, and made a savage movement towards Tom.

Tom Merry raised his hand.

"If you give us any trouble, we'll pitch you into the hold again, and leave you there!" he said.

And Hookey, with a sullen scowl, gave in. And there was no more rum brought from the captain's stores. But when the juniors had rested, they descended one after another into the interior of the ship, and brought up bags of biscuits and tins of preserved meat and bottles of mineral water. And then, seated on the keel of the plunging wreck, they enjoyed a feed—very different from the feeds they had been used to in the old study at St. Jim's, but perhaps even more enjoyable.

"Well, I feel better now," said Tom Merry, with a deep sigh, as he finished his meal. "If we could only see a sail now——"

There was a sudden yell of delight from Blake.

"Look!"

He jumped up, reckless of the danger of pitching into the sea, and waved his hands.

In the red sunset the black smoke of a steamer came shadowing over the sea before the wind. The juniors clambered up in wild excitement.

"Crikey!" said Hookey. "Wot luck! If they see us——"

"Help!" shouted the juniors together. "Ship, ahoy! Help!"—too excited for the moment to realise that their voices could not reach half the distance.

"They can't hear us, of course!" exclaimed Tom Merry at last. "But they may see us."

He plunged into the gap in the hull, and reappeared in a few minutes with a blanket from the captain's cabin and a spar. The blanket, tied to the spar, was waved in the air by the juniors.

The black smoke bore down nearer to them—they had been seen!

The steamer ran close down to the wreck—a boat dropped

into the water. A quarter of an hour later Tom Merry & Co. and Hookey were on the steamer's deck—bound for the Thames and home!

CHAPTER 17.

Home Again.

FIGGINS of the Fourth rushed like a lunatic into the School House at St. Jim's.

He bumped into Levison, and knocked him out of the way; he ran into Cutts of the Fifth, and sent him staggering, and rushed on towards the common-room.

At any other time George Figgins's sudden irruption would have been taken as a sign of hostility, and Figgins would have been piled on by the School House fellows and hurled forth ignominiously into the quadrangle.

But just now House raids and House rags were no more.

The shadow of the fate of Tom Merry and his companions lay upon the old school, and the rival juniors had ceased from ragging, in the gloom that hung over both Houses. For the disappearance of the four juniors, and their long absence without a word, was not explained, and seemed inexplicable, unless some terrible accident had befallen them.

St. Jim's had been astonished when Raggles had returned with the car, and the announcement that Master D'Arcy and his companions had vanished.

When they failed to appear next day, the school was alarmed as well as surprised.

A day or two later came the arrest of Sharpey & Co., when they attempted to dispose of the plunder they had taken from the St. Jim's juniors. D'Arcy's watch was known at once, and the other things easily identified, when the young rascals were in the hands of the police, and the Head of St. Jim's communicated with. So much light was let in on what had happened to the juniors since Raggles had left them in the car.

But Sharpey & Co. could only own that they had robbed the juniors, and left them safe and sound otherwise. They knew nothing of the shanghaieing.

They were held by the police, but it could not be suspected that they had done worse than they had admitted—the actual disappearance of the juniors could not be attributed to them. Then what had become of Tom Merry & Co.? As day followed day without news, their friends at St. Jim's almost abandoned hope.

Manners went about with a very long face, Digby and Herries looked too miserable for words; there were visits to the Head from their friends and relations; the police were busy everywhere with searching, and still there was no news.

Hope began to die.

Figgins & Co. of the New House seemed to feel it almost as much as Manners himself.

Hence Figgins's excitement when he burst into the School House in the way we have described, shoving fellows to right and left as he dashed to the common-room.

Into the common-room he burst like a whirlwind.

A crowd of juniors were there, most of them discussing the same old subject—what had become of Tom Merry & Co.?

Manners was seated in a chair, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his gaze fixed moodily upon the fire.

He was plunged into a profound dejection, and he did not even look up as Figgins of the New House burst in.

Figgins gave a shout, and brandished a newspaper over his head.

"News!" he shouted.

Then Manners looked up.

"News!" he said eagerly. "Not news of——"

"Yes, yes, yes!" chirruped Figgins joyfully.

"Oh, my hat! The news—quick!"

"Safe and sound—all of them!" yelled Figgins.

"Hurrah!"

"It's in the 'Evening News'!" gasped Figgins. "Only a short telegram; there'll be fuller news in the morning, I suppose. But here it is. 'The s.s. Baltic, New York to London, has picked up five survivors of a wreck in mid-Atlantic. Four of them state that they are schoolboys, 'shanghaied' on board the vessel they sailed in. Their names are given as Merry, Lowther, Blake, and D'Arcy—the last-named a son of Lord Eastwood. If this account is true, the remarkable disappearance of four boys, which has caused so much commotion, is now explained.'"

"That's all," said Figgins; "but it's enough. The young bounders have been to sea!"

"Shanghaied!" said Manners. "My hat! Then they've been to sea as sailors—working before the mast!"

"Poor old Gussy!" chuckled Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 26.)

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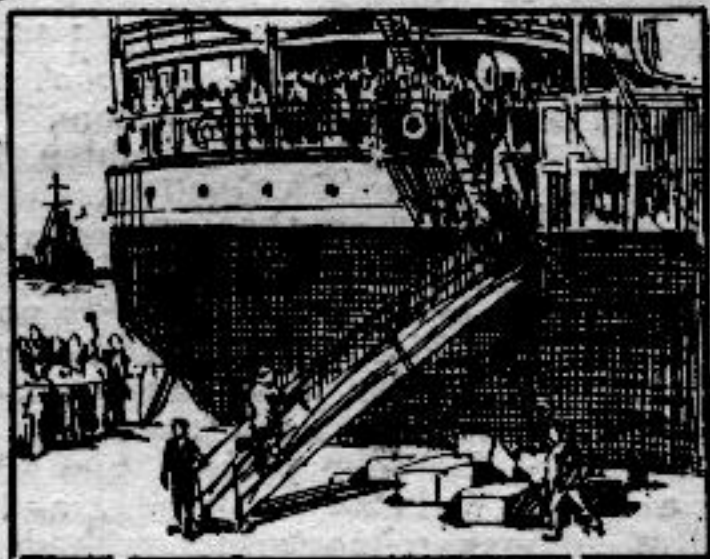
A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"TRIED AND TRUE!"

HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.



OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Farming in Canada.

The "Free" Grant of Land.

The Demand for Farm Labour.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

"Do 'ee call that farming?" asked an astonished Old Countryman, who, standing by my side, was watching threshing operations on a big Canadian farm for the first time. And certainly the method of dealing with the wheat crop that he was witnessing was very unlike anything he had ever seen in Britain.

As far as the eye could see were rows of golden wheat-stooks—sheaves is the English word, I believe—and a machine attached to a traction-engine was passing between the rows. From the machine sprang out steel hooks, which gripped each stook in turn, and cast it into the machine, from which it was automatically hurled into a waggon also drawn by the traction-engine. A little farther away from us was another marvellous machine, into which two men armed with pitch-forks were tossing stooks of wheat from other waggons. Knives in this threshing-machine sliced the wheat up, and through a funnel was pouring the separated grain. Hundreds of these traction-engines and machines are used on the prairies. The ploughing and seeding, in addition to the threshing, are done by steam on all the big farms.

Speed is the great consideration in Canadian farming, as in all other industries in the Dominion. Everyone wants to make money fast. And certainly many farmers accumulate it quickly enough. A good harvest means a clear profit of ten thousand dollars (£2,000) on the year's work to some of the big landowners.

Last week I told you that in the Western provinces inexperienced farm labourers are paid about ten dollars (£2) a month, with board and lodging. Experienced men, though, receive on an average for the busy eight months of the year twenty-five to forty-five dollars (£5 to £9) a month and board. If men are kept on during the winter, their wages for that season will probably be at about half the summer rate. Men who can work the machines are often paid as much as four to five dollars (16s. to £1) a day. The wages all round during the busy harvest season are very high.

But, of course, the wonderful machinery used on the big farms is expensive to purchase or hire, and the small homesteader has to use horses or oxen to help him with his work. The settler's first crop seldom affords any profit, but merely goes to provide fodder for the winter months.

There is one piece of advice I particularly wish to give my chums who are thinking of emigrating for the purpose of becoming farmers in the West. On no account take up a piece of land far from civilisation and live on it alone. Hundreds of young fellows have done this, and I think it has been proved conclusively that to live a solitary life in this way is the greatest mistake imaginable. Such an existence is not only unnatural, it is positively dangerous. Let us consider what such a life means in too many cases.

A young man, we'll say, takes up a homestead situated fifty miles from a town, and ten miles from anybody else's "quarter section." He takes a team of horses, a waggon, a plough, and a goodly store of provisions to his homestead, besides many other things, and starts to work in splendid fashion to make his land yield its increase. His most important work consists in building a "shack" from small logs which he cuts, and ploughing and seeding several acres of ground. Twice during the summer, perhaps, he makes friendly calls on other homesteaders, and, notwithstanding the additional labour he has to perform, in cooking his food and keeping his "shack" clean, he manages to write many letters to his relatives in the Homeland. These he posts

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1^d.

when he pays a visit to town. In the autumn he harvests his crop and cuts a supply of wood for fuel.

He has now been living alone on his land for several months, and, although he is physically in good health, his disposition is changing slowly and surely, and possibly without his noticing the fact himself. One of the signs of this change is that he does not do so much work as he did at first. Indeed, he finds anything in the nature of toil a great effort, and he prefers to mooch around with no object in view, or put in time idly lying in his camp-bed. Even his correspondence suffers. Our lonely young man feels he has nothing to tell the old folk at home, and, as he finds it increasingly boring to write, he ceases to do so at all. Here let me mention that scores of inquiries are received at the headquarters of the Royal North West Mounted Police at Regina from distressed mothers and wives who have ceased to hear from settlers on land in the West. Many of these men who cause so much anxiety to their friends in the Homeland, when traced by the Mounted Police, prove to be homesteaders who have been living a lonely life.

But let us return to our particular young settler. Not only does he neglect his outdoor work, but his domestic arrangements suffer from his inertia. His shack gets into a filthy state, he ceases to wash up his dishes after meals, and he becomes unkempt in his personal appearance. In every way, indeed, his material surroundings reflect the effect that the humdrum, lonely life is having on his mind.

From being an active, enthusiastic young man, he has become lazy, careless, and morose. Should he see any of the neighbouring farmers—who, in all probability, are living as solitary a life as himself—he speaks in surly monosyllables, and loses his temper over veriest trifles. Ofttimes during the long winter months he paces the confines of his tiny shack like a convict, muttering to himself.

And then the last chapter of this little drama—or tragedy, as it really is—is unfolded. The lonely young homesteader becomes a madman, or, as the Canadians would say, he goes "bughouse." When going on to his "free" land so blithely he never took into consideration such a development as this. He was not fitted for the lonely life he had to lead, and it exacted its terrible toll.

Perhaps some trooper of the Mounted Police, patrolling his wide stretch of country, will call to remove the unfortunate victim of solitude in time to save his life.

Nothing is more pathetic than to see sufferers from this "prairie madness," as it is called, waiting under a strong guard at a railway-station for the train that is to take them to New Westminster, British Columbia, where the great lunatic asylum is situated.

I have expatiated at some length on the lonely existence led by many young men on the prairies, but I feel that the warning against this kind of existence cannot be given too strongly. No matter what opportunities you may have of securing a good piece of land in Canada, if it is far from civilisation, and you have to live on it alone, refuse it at the price. You may think you could stand a solitary life, but then nearly every young fellow who takes up a homestead thinks that. No, my chums, don't take the risk; it's not worth the candle! You can get on in Canada without that.

In next week's article I shall begin to tell you of the prospects for young men in other trades and occupations in the Dominion, including a few words about the ever-interesting work of the cowboys.

(Another of these interesting Articles next week.)

OUR GREAT NEW SERIAL.

PLAYING THE GAME!



A Splendid Tale of School, Sport, and Adventure.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster, one of the most popular members of Grovehouse School, is elected to fill a vacant place in the school cricket team. His victory earns him the enmity of Bangley Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his chum Weames. Together they plot to ruin Foster. The latter's father, who controls a company with Jeffcock senior, is made responsible for the failure of the company, and a warrant is issued for his arrest. The charge preferred is that Major Foster made use of the company's money for his own purposes. After saying good-bye to his son, Major Foster flees the country. A trumped-up charge of robbery is brought against Geoffrey, and he is expelled from the school. After seeing his mother at his uncle's house, Geoffrey sets out for fame and fortune. Chance brings him in contact with the Belvidere Cricket Club, who ask Geoffrey to play for them. This Foster does, and succeeds in distinguishing himself. He later gets a situation at Grice & Mortimer's, where, by a strange coincidence, Patrick Mulready, who was Major Foster's orderly, is also employed. Geoffrey finds that small sums of money are missing day by day from his petty-cash box, and complains to Mr. Grice. Later on he meets his enemy Jeffcock, when playing against the latter's team, and manages to bowl him second ball. Jeffcock finds out where Foster is employed, and tells Mr. Grice that Geoffrey was expelled from Grovehouse. He is accused of misappropriating the money from the cashbox, and is sacked. Mulready confesses to the thefts; but, nevertheless, Geoffrey is not reinstated, and the two leave the office, never to return.

(Now go on with the story.)

In the Mile End Road—The Row—Geoffrey Thrashes a Ruffian—The Accident—Locked Up—Joe Gunning's Friendly Attitude.

Geoffrey could not rest at home that night. His rooms were plain ones, in a back street in St. Mary's, Whitechapel, and very simply furnished. After the luxury in which he had been brought up at home, they were squalid in the extreme. But they were clean, and he knew that beggars could not be choosers. He ate the supper which his landlady, a Mrs. Solomons, provided him with, with relish, despite his worried state of mind, and that done, sauntered out into the streets, to wander full of thought along the Mile End Road, that magnificent thoroughfare so little known of in the West, and which could be made into one of London's noblest streets, and later on, despite the fact that he could

ill afford the money, he paid a shilling, and entered the Paragon Theatre of Varieties, where, if he could believe the bills, was to be seen the finest entertainment in London.

It was ten minutes past eleven when the audience were turned out, and they swarmed into the streets, blackening the wide pavements for half a hundred yards on each side of the music-hall.

By this time Geoffrey's mind was at ease. Whatever the future might hold for him, he was resigned to it, and he had such faith in himself as to believe that he must get something to do soon, for, after all, he had a good appearance, a good address, and an intelligence above the ordinary, assets which were worth money to him, and which he had reason to be satisfied with without egotism.

As he wandered on, full of thought, he became suddenly aware of a wild commotion in front of him, and heard the shrieks of several women and the cries of men.

A crowd had gathered in that wonderful way that crowds do in big cities, and in the midst of a motley group of men and women Geoffrey could see the swinging of bare arms and hear the sound of crushing blows. Then came a woman's cry.

"You coward! He's only a boy; leave him alone! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you villain!"

Then came the sound of a fall, and a groan. In a moment Geoffrey had pushed his way to the front, and on the ground he saw a lad of about sixteen lying, who was bleeding from the mouth, whilst over him stood a hulking brute of a man, whose muscular frame and huge, rounded forearms suggested enormous physical strength.

By comparison in size and weight, the fallen lad was but a babe. Yet the man had been fighting him, and not content with knocking him almost senseless to the ground, Geoffrey saw the brute aim a violent kick at him, and heard the prostrate boy's moan of pain.

Then a man darted out of the crowd, and put his arms around the brutal bully.

"Leave the boy alone!" cried the man. "You're a nice sort of chap to look after, you are, Alf Brookes. If I weren't well paid for the job, I'd cry quits of you, and hand you over to the police, I would."

"You leave me alone!" growled the man addressed as Brookes, shaking off the restraining arms of his comrade. "The boy insulted me, and I'm going to kill him!"

With that he rushed at the boy again, and lunged another kick at him.

It was more than Geoffrey Foster could bear. With a spring he got in front of the brute, and, lifting his left fist, he shot it out from the shoulder, putting the weight of his body behind it. His fingers clenched just as the blow

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landed home, and it was given with all the skill that he had acquired at Grovehouse and in his earlier Grammar School days. On the point of the bully's jaw the blow landed, and down went Alf Brookes upon the pavement, with a thud that shook every bone he had in his body and mixed up his muddled brains, so that he scarcely knew where he was.

A shout of "Bravo!" went up, and as the members of the crowd saw that it was another lad, who had had the pluck to face Alf Brookes, the terror of Whitechapel, they yelled in ecstasy.

But Brookes was a hard nut to crack, and as soon as he had recalled his scattered thoughts he got upon his feet, and after rubbing his chin, and looking at Geoffrey, as if to weigh up the fighting capabilities of this new enemy, he came at the Grovehouse boy with a rush.

"I'll do for you," he cried. "I'll eat you!" And a swinging blow went past Geoffrey's ear with a swish that startled him.

But though looking far the bigger man, Brookes was not so much the heavier than the lad who faced him, and that Geoffrey could hit mighty hard had been evidenced. The crowd swarmed round in their excitement. Some of them had removed the half-conscious victim of Brookes's earlier attack, and now they were encouraging Foster to "go in and win!"

"Hit him hard, or he'll have yer!" said someone.

Brookes was shaping like a professional pugilist, and as he put his hands up Geoffrey began to wonder if he would ever be able to get at him. But Brookes, despising his young enemy, as he launched out a mighty blow with his left, and followed it up with another, with the right, laid himself open to attack, and to his astonishment, and the no less astonishment of Brookes's comrade, Geoffrey guarded both blows with ease, landed one in the ribs, which made Brookes grunt, fought him back to the edge of the pavement, and then with a well-timed right, toppled him over into the gutter, where he lay extended in the mud.

That fall was fatal. A man had been running a baby motor-car to a stand to see what the trouble was, and being unable to pull up in time, the front wheel of his car went over the prostrate Brookes's extended arm.

There came a squeal of anguish, an ominous crack, and when the car had been hastily removed from the damaged limb, a bystander, bending over Brookes, discovered that the bone was fractured.

"Serve the brute right!" he cried. "He brought it all on himself. Someone had better take him to the hospital. That's an end to his fight with the Tea Taster. Well, he's only got himself to blame."

They helped Brookes to his feet. A couple of policemen had by this time arrived on the scene.

"I give him in charge," said Alf Brookes, pointing to Geoffrey and moaning in pain. "He broke my arm, he did. I'll have him sent to quod, I will!"

And, writhing in agony, they put him in the motor-car, and he was driven away as fast as the chauffeur could go to the hospital near by. One policeman set himself to taking notes of the occurrence; another put his hand on Geoffrey's shoulder.

"I think you will have to come with me, my lad," he said.

"What for?" cried a bystander. "I saw it all. He was not to blame. Alf Brookes nearly killed a boy, and as he was kicking him to death, this gentleman came up and put a stop to it. Then they fought, but he only fought in self-defence."

"Do you know anything of this, Gunning?" asked the policeman, addressing himself to the man who had been with Brookes. "You've been looking after the 'Terror'—Brookes's popular name in Whitechapel—haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the man addressed as Gunning. "And a nice time I've had of it too. I've been training the blackguard, and keeping him sober. It's when he can't get anything to drink that Brookes is worst. I just turned my attention away from him to-night to speak to a pal, and the next moment he was fighting a lad who happened to stumble against him. I don't know what would have happened if this young gentleman hadn't come up and knocked Brookes out o' time."

"Which wants some doing, I think," said the policeman, with a smile. "I know whenever we've had to run Brookes in, it's taken a dozen of us to manage him."

"Well, let's hope he'll learn sense in the hospital," cried Gunning in disgust.

"Are you going to charge this gentleman with assault?" asked the policeman.

"I don't want to," said Gunning, regarding Geoffrey with considerable favour. "I don't see that he was at all to blame."

The attitude of the crowd, which was entirely in Geoffrey's favour against the police, at this juncture became so

threatening, that the policeman whispered to Geoffrey:

"You'd better come with us to the station, sir. It will only be a formality. The superintendent will hear what you have to say, and take your name and address. Then if you are called upon to answer any charge, we shall know where to find you. Only we'd better get away from here, or there'll be a disturbance, and once they start on us police down here, there is no knowing where they will end."

Geoffrey understood.

"All right," he said, "I'll come."

The two policemen, Geoffrey, and Gunning moved off, and, followed by a large and hostile crowd, they walked to the police-station, and here Geoffrey found himself thrust into the dock, where he underwent a lengthy cross-examination on the part of the superintendent. When the examination was over the officer bit the end of his pen, and looked at Geoffrey with an inquiring glance.

"I'm sorry to see you mixed up in such a disturbance, sir," he said. "Under the circumstances I don't see what else we can do but to keep you here all night. When you appear before the magistrate in the morning, you will, of course, be discharged. Gunning, do you bear out the gentleman's statement?"

"Every word," said the bluff, red-faced, good-natured East-End. "It were all Brookes's fault. Nobody knows what a trouble and a trial he is better than I do—unless it's the police."

"Well, Foster"—the superintendent used the surname genially—"we shall keep you as our guest. We'll do our best to make you comfortable, and hope you don't mind."

"It seems I have no real say in the matter," said Geoffrey with a smile, thinking that he might just as well stay in the police-station as anywhere else, and he was almost past caring what happened to him. "Will you appear to say a good word for me to-morrow, Gunning?"

"Ay, that I will," said the man, with a nod and a wink. "My name's Joe Gunning, one time middle-weight champion of England, now trainer and coach. And don't I wish I had you under my supervision for a little while. My word, wouldn't I make something out of you!"

"Moderate your transports, Gunning," said the superintendent, smiling. "You're not in the gymnasium now."

"Quite right, sir," said Gunning, whom Geoffrey discovered was gifted with a never-ending flow of speech. "Only what I am going to say to the gentleman who has backed Alf Brookes to lick the Tea Taster at the National Sporting Club in November for £100 a side? Will you tell me that? Brookes won't be fit to fight for another twelve months."

"A good thing for the police," said the superintendent.

"But it ain't a good thing for Mr. Jellotson, as kind a gentleman as ever breathed. He'll say I ought to have minded Brookes better. He'll say it was my fault that he got damaged. I shall lose my character, and if once I get into trouble with the gentlemen of the National Sporting Club, where will my livelihood go to—can you tell me that?"

"I'm not here to answer conundrums," said the superintendent, motioning to the sergeant to remove the prisoner from the cage as a case of drunk and disorderly was brought in. "You turn up in court in the morning, Gunning, and think about what you're going to say to your patron meanwhile."

They were the last words Geoffrey heard, for the next instant he was taken from the dock and escorted by the police, who treated him with every consideration, along a stone-paved corridor to the cells, into one of which he was placed and locked up for the night.

Geoffrey was not very concerned. He knew that he would get his freedom in the morning. But the mention of the name of Jellotson of Grovehouse? William Hewitt on the afternoon of the Madley match had said Jellotson was a member of the National Sporting Club, and had taken to boxing as a sport. Yes, he thought, it must be the same, and then he began to think of the injury he had unwittingly done to his old Grovehouse friend by rendering the brutal Alf Brookes hors de combat.

He could not sleep, and so, throwing himself full length on the trestle bed which was secured to the stone wall of his cell, he took what rest he could, and waited for the morning.

Discharged—Jellotson—The Luncheon in Whitechapel.

"From the evidence that had been given in court to-day, it appears that the prisoner, instead of standing in the dock, ought to be honoured for his courage and true manliness. There is no doubt that this Alf Brookes, a ruffian of the worst type, whom I have had to sentence to terms of imprisonment for ruffianism in this very court behaved in a particularly outrageous fashion. Unfortunately, the young lad whom he attacked is too ill to appear in court, and give

evidence, but it seems that when well enough to leave hospital Brookes will be charged with assault and violent conduct, and will himself occupy the place where the prisoner Foster now stands."

It was the magistrate who was speaking, and a crowded court listened to every word with eager interest.

"The witness Gunning, who acted as trainer to the man Brookes," the magistrate went on, "not only corroborates the story of the other witnesses of the scene, but declares that from the very outset the prisoner was in no way to blame, and only interfered in order to save the injured boy—who might have been kicked to death—from further harm. Under the circumstances, I do not think I can do otherwise than discharge the prisoner."

An outburst of cheering shook the very roof of the court-house, and interrupted the magistrate, giving him a chance to get his breath.

When silence once more reigned the presiding official looked round.

"If that noise is repeated," he said, "I shall have to clear the court." But the smile that played about his grim lips proved that his bark was worse than his bite; and a ripple of laughter went round.

"Foster," the magistrate went on, turning to the dock, upon which Geoffrey was leaning, taking a keen interest in the proceedings, "I am only sorry that you should have occupied such an ignominious position as that in which you are this moment placed, even for a single moment; but the law of the land must be obeyed. I have no doubt that it will be a long time ere you are seen within the dock of a police-court again. You are discharged, and I must compliment you upon the courage and resource you have shown in dealing with such a ruffian as he whom you so gallantly fought last night."

Another cheer went up from the rough but good-hearted crowd that had come to the police-court on purpose to hear Geoffrey charged, and many of whom had given evidence, and a sergeant motioned to Geoffrey to follow him. He did so, and a moment later found himself in a hall beyond the court; and Gunning, who had shown himself in true sporting colours at the hearing, held forth his hand.

"I should like to congratulate you, sir," he said.

Geoffrey gripped the extended palm, as rough and as hard as a piece of tanned hide, thanked him, and smiled. Then Gunning turned to explain his views on boxing as a fine art to a police-constable standing near. He had not time, however, for a cab drew up outside the court-house, and a well-dressed man of tall stature and fine physique entered.

Recognising Gunning, he stepped up to him, and, with an angry frown, said:

"Look here, Gunning! What's all this about Brookes being injured?"

"It's true, sir," said Joe Gunning. "It couldn't be helped. Brookes got out of 'and last night. He started 'scrapping' with a kid, whom he would have killed; but there was a youngster in the crowd not likely to stand by and see such brutality, and he stood up to Brookes, with the result that the bully got more than he bargained for."

"Oh, that's all very fine!" said the gentleman irritably. "But where do I come in? I back myself to find an unknown who will fight the 'Tea Taster' for one hundred pounds a-side, and when you've got me Brookes, the best man available for the purpose, ruffian though he undoubtedly is, and I pay you to train him, keep him sober, and look after him, you go and get the man injured. It's a bright look-out for me and my money, isn't it?"

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped, Mr. Jellotson. You know me, Joe Gunning, one of the best, and as straight a sportsman as any in London. I wouldn't willingly 'sell you a pup,' now, would I?"

"Oh, you're a decent chap enough! I admit that, Gunning," said Mr. Jellotson. "If I hadn't been sure of you, I wouldn't have engaged you for the job. But you can't get me another man of Brookes's class at a moment's notice, can you?"

Gunning scratched his head.

"I'm afraid I can't, sir," he said.

"Well, there you are. That's what I mean. And now, how about this tough who laid Brookes out? He must have been smart. I suppose they've remanded him?"

"No, sir," said Gunning, suddenly remembering Geoffrey Foster. "He's discharged. It wasn't his fault. And he's quite a gentleman, too; that's the funny part of it. He's as much a gentleman as you are. Hallo! Where's he gone to? He was here just now. Constable, have you seen Mr. Foster?"

"Foster?" said Jellotson, with a start. "What's his other name?"

"Geoffrey—Mr. Geoffrey Foster."

"Geoffrey Foster!" cried Jellotson, more wide awake than ever. "A youngster of barely twenty? A little shorter

than me, but finely built, with light-brown hair and blue eyes?"

"That's him, sir," said Joe Gunning. "You don't mean to say you know him, Mr. Jellotson? Hallo! There he is, just leaving the court now!"

Jellotson wheeled about, and was just in time to see Geoffrey as he stepped out of the entrance to the court-house into the street.

In a moment the aristocrat recognised the boy whom he had last seen as he was leaving Grovehouse in disgrace, with the cheers of his comrades ringing in his ears; and with a sudden exclamation of joy Jellotson rushed from Joe Gunning's side and raced after his old school-chum.

"Foster! Foster! Foster!" he shouted. And Geoffrey, finding there was nothing else for it, turned round. He had recognised Jellotson the moment the latter had appeared, but, rather than meet his old friend under such circumstances, he had taken advantage of his speaking to his trainer Joe Gunning to sneak away.

Jellotson's arm was round him now, however, and the chance of getting away was gone.

"Foster, my dear lad, I am glad to see you!" cried Jellotson. "And you would have gone without even saying 'How do you do?' if it hadn't been for Gunning! How are you? What are you doing? Where do you live? What the deuce brought you to Whitechapel last night? How is your mother? Have you got any money, or do you want any, which is more to the point? If so, I've got enough and to spare. Egad, you do look fit! What did you do after you left Grovehouse? Have you heard any news of your father? Have you seen Hewitt or any of the boys?"

Geoffrey laughed outright.

"One question at a time, Jellotson," he said, "and I may be able to answer you. I've been through so much, and so many things have happened, that I don't know where to begin."

"Never mind," said Jellotson; "we'll talk presently. Here's Gunning. Gunning, where the deuce can we get something to eat in this ghastly hole? You know all the likely places about here, I dare say?"

"I do, sir," said the trainer, filling his chest out in pride. "And I tell you what. I promise you I'll take you somewhere—the food will be plain, mind you—where you'll get as good a grill and as fine a bottle of wine as anywhere in London, Ritz and Carlton Hotels included."

"Then that's the place for us," said Jellotson quickly. "I'm hungry, and I'll bet a pound Foster is, to say nothing of a man like you, Gunning, past his athletic prime, and able to eat forbidden fruit without fear. So lead the way, my worthy upholder of the ancient and noble art."

Gunning grinned, and, taking them first down one thoroughfare, then along another, he paused outside an eating-house whose smart appearance certainly suggested enterprise on the part of the proprietor, and where there is enterprise there is usually something solid and reliable to back it up.

Joe Gunning was no false prophet. The luncheon the three partook of was of the best, the porter-house steak being beautifully cooked, and the wine suitable for the palate of an epicure.

Then, when the food had been despatched, with a sigh of contentment, Jellotson leaned back in his seat and turned to Geoffrey.

"I want to hear everything that has happened to you, my dear lad," he said, "ever since Dr. Morgan was heartless enough to turn you out of the school. The madman! If he had only known what Hewitt and I knew of the true circumstances of the case he would be breaking his heart with remorse even now. Did you never have a suspicion as to who was guilty of breaking open the cricket club treasury, and stealing that money, Foster?"

"I can't say I ever gave it a thought," said Geoffrey. "I had so many other things to trouble me."

"It was Jeffcock and Weames," said Jellotson, bringing his fist down upon the table with a bang that made the glasses jump and jingle. "Jeffcock told the doctor that you had left the school that night, didn't he? Who but he would have thought of such a villainous scheme? Besides, Weames had plenty of money to spend afterwards, though he was known to be broke a day or two before. I've had my knife into them ever since. I'm only burning to get even with Jeffcock. One day I shall, and let them look out!"

(There will be an extra long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday, when Foster is informed of a startling development that has upset Jellotson's plans, and put Jeffcock in a good position. Make sure of your copy by ordering in advance.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 326.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS

(Continued from page 21.)

"And they'll be back here soon," grinned Digby. "Oh, this is ripping!"

"The Baltic's in the Thames now. They're landed already," said Figgins. "They'll be here in the morning, I should think. We'll give 'em a reception."

"Yes, rather."

Excitement reigned in St. Jim's that evening in both houses, and from end to end as the great news spread.

From Kildare, the captain of the school, down to the youngest fag, the whole school rejoiced.

And the next morning St. Jim's was looking forward with eagerness to the return of the wanderers.

The Head had received a telegram apprising him of their safe return, and of the fact that they would arrive at St. Jim's in the morning.

And the juniors of St. Jim's could hardly keep in the form-room that morning, so keen was the excitement.

But morning lessons were over at last, and they swarmed out into the quadrangle, to look for the arrival of Tom Merry & Co.

They had not arrived yet.

"What blessed train can they be coming by?" Figgins exclaimed. "The twelve train's in long ago. They ought to be here."

"Not coming till the afternoon, perhaps," said Dig, and his face fell.

"But they said this morning—"

"Hallo!" shouted Kangaroo of the Shell, who was looking along the road from the gates. "Hallo! Look out! Here they are!"

Zip, zip, zip!

It was the sound of a motor-car.

There was a rush to the gates. Down the long white road came sweeping the big car, and the St. Jim's fellows recognised Raggles, the chauffeur of Lord Eastwood, in the driving-seat.

It was the car in which the swell of St. Jim's and his guests had gone for that famous drive. They were evidently returning to the school as they had left it—in Lord Eastwood's car. There was no doubt about it, for as the car came nearer the four juniors were recognised sitting in it, waving their hands, and Arthur Augustus waving a silk hat.

The crowd of juniors at the gates burst into a welcoming cheer.

"Hurrah! Hip-pip-hurrah!"

The car came dashing up to the gates, and stopped. It was surrounded by a mob of fellows all eager to shake hands with the returned wanderers, and to thump them on the back, and congratulate them, and ask them where they had been, and what they had been up to.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite his old self again now, and not looking in the slightest degree like the ship's boy of the Ramchunder, smiled serenely at the excited crowd. Never had the swell of St. Jim's been more conspicuous for that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Vewy glad to see you all again, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "We've been wathah longah away than we intended—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But now we've come home fwom our little wun in the cah," said Arthur Augustus, as calmly as if he and his comrades had returned from the afternoon's run they had planned. "Yaas, thanks; we've had quite a good time—wewally, quite a good time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the four heroes of the hour descended from the car, and a cheering crowd marched into the quadrangle with the Shanghaied Schoolboys.

THE END.

(Another splendid long complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled: "Tried and True," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the GEM in advance.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 326.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

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The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Miss E. Pearson, Dairy Farm, Pile Street, Arncliffe, near Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 18.

Walter Berry, 1076, Dufferin Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 18-20.

Miss Mary La France, G.P.O., Cradoc, Huon, Tasmania, wishes to correspond with a young man living in England interested in cards, photos, or stamps, age 19-23.

Fred Evans, 466, Charlton Avenue West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 17-20.

Miss Irene Freeman, Roseneath, Waratah Street, Canterbury, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with girl readers in England.

A. Allen, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Ireland or Scotland.

William H. Buchanan, c.o. Mr. Laidlow, via Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers in any part of the British Empire, age 20-21.

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A. Hudson, 58, Laws Street, Kingston, Jamaica, British West Indies, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 14-15.

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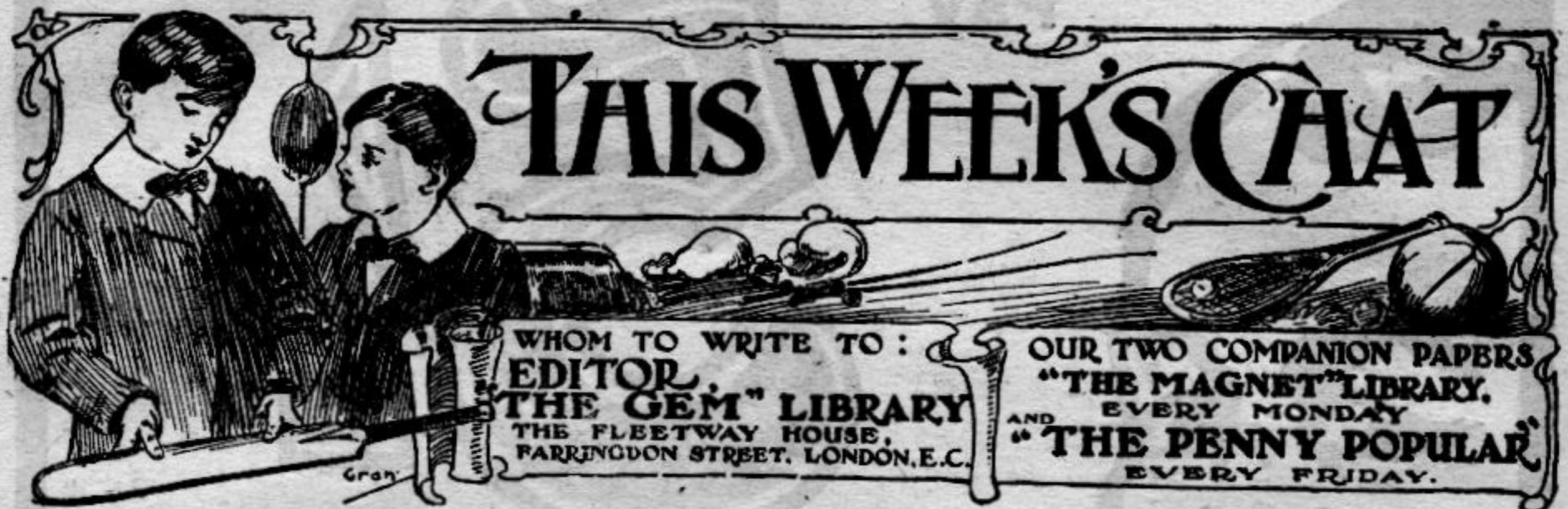
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"TRIED AND TRUE!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In our next long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's Tom Merry is confronted by a difficult situation, which he faces with all the independence of his upright and straight-forward nature. His treatment of Mr. Brandreth, the South African millionaire, who wishes to make Tom his heir—on conditions—causes his chums many misgivings, and the millionaire himself considerable surprise.

Mr. Brandreth's first visit to St. Jim's leaves him, apparently, far from favourably impressed by his intended heir; while Tom Merry, for his part, hopes that he has seen and heard the last of the millionaire. This is not the case; but when Tom next hears from Mr. Brandreth, it is in far different circumstances.

Tom Merry is put to a severe test, but his sturdy character stands it without flinching, and in the end he emerges triumphant—

"TRIED AND TRUE!"

"THE GEM" EXCHANGE CIRCLE.

An organisation which was founded by one of my "Gemite" chums over two years ago, and which has made marvellous progress in that time, is "The Gem" Exchange Circle. I have recently received a letter from the founder, Herbert W. Henbest, enclosing a copy of the rules of the Exchange Circle, and also a copy of the magazine of the organisation. This magazine is entitled "Our Stamp Opinion," and is published every two months, and a very excellent publication it is. Among its contents are articles and stamp notes, a list of members, a competition, correspondence, notes concerning the various branches of the Circle, suggestions, and, of course, an Editorial. "Our Stamp Opinion" is one of the best got-up private magazines I have seen, and I heartily congratulate the Editor of it.

"The Gem" Exchange Circle is designed to appeal to stamp-collecting "Gemites," enabling members to dispose of their duplicates quickly and to the best advantage. "Friendship" is the motto of the Exchange Circle, which appears to be run on the right lines throughout.

Space does not permit me to say as much as I would like to about this excellent organisation, but I may mention that handsome badges of sterling silver and enamel can be had by members at less than cost price. Applications for membership should be addressed to Herbert W. Henbest, 17, Dickens Terrace, Wainscott, Rochester, Kent.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Two Seaside Girls.—More may be heard of Tom Merry minor in the future.

J. H. B. (Preston).—Please send me your address.

The Terrible Three (Southport).—Henry is Manners' Christian name. Wally D'Arcy is about thirteen years old.

THE MUNICIPAL SERVICE AS A PROFESSION.

Promotion and Prospects.

Measured only by its yearly salaries the municipal profession would not be so attractive as it really is. To the prospect thus suggested must be added the liberal arrangements usually made for superannuation. Under the L.C.C. the contributions of the members of the staff at the rate of two and a half per cent. per annum on their salaries are doubled by the Council; the assured continuity of employment until the age of 65, subject only to good conduct and reasonably good health; the liberal allowance of holidays and of pay during sickness; the interest and variety of the daily work.

As regards the first three factors the municipal service will compare not unfavourably with those branches of the Civil Service to which admission can be obtained through competitive examinations. In regard to the fourth, the municipal service would appear to have a decided advantage over the Civil Service.

As a rule, the young fellow who gets into a Government Department spends the rest of his life within the same comparatively limited groove of work. The importance and responsibility of his own particular task may grow as he grows in years, but day after day it will be concerned with exactly the same kind of things. Thus the junior clerk in the Customs House, for example, has, as a rule, only the Customs House, with its somewhat narrow sphere of routine, to look forward to for the rest of his days, although in later life he may be composing the documents which as a youth he had merely to copy—and so it is with the Post Office, Inland Revenue Office, etc.

In the municipal service of our large cities a young man will find that plenty of work is expected of him during his working hours, and that there is practically none of the arm-chair lounging which, rightly or wrongly, is often attributed to some of the Government offices. But, on the other hand, as he climbs the ladder of promotion, he will find that the work has more interest and variety than could usually be looked for in ordinary mercantile life. He may pass, for example, from the clerkship of a municipal committee concerned with tramways or electric lighting to the clerkship of one dealing with parks or fire brigade, and as clerk to a committee his work in keeping the minutes, preparing reports, conducting correspondence, etc., will be varied by official visits to places connected with these various undertakings.

The officials of a municipality are not concerned with its policy; they have simply to administer the municipal services in accordance with the resolutions arrived at by the representatives of the electors. But when occupying the higher positions, they are often called upon to advise committees before these resolutions are arrived at, and this work is entirely congenial to men of political instinct and capacity. And to men of good civic spirit—as all municipal servants should be—there is the pleasant consciousness, whatever be their grade in the service, of working for the civic service, and not merely for the labourer's hire.

(Next Week: A Special Article on "Keeping Fit.")

The Editor

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

THERE WOULD!

James was a simple country yokel who had never strayed further than the outskirts of his native village, and because he stood in a railway-station for the first time of his life his amazement was great. The vastness of his surroundings completely dazzled him, but when the 3.30 express dashed right through the station, that did it. He kept his eyes glued on the tunnel through which it had disappeared, staring after it as though some kind of a miracle had happened. He remained like this for several minutes, much to the amusement of the various onlookers, until at length an inquisitive porter asked him what he was staring at.

"Ah was just thinkun," he said, pulling himself together as best he could, "what a terribal smash there'd 'a' bin if he'd missed the 'ole!"—Sent in by William A. Garrett, Liverpool.

EVER BEEN HAD?

A large crowd had gathered round the entrance to the circus, listening to the showman explaining and making a great fuss about the wonders of his menagerie.

"I'll bet you five pounds," said a nice-looking old gentleman, "you can't let me see a real live lion!"

"Done!" said the showman. "Please step this way!"

The old man did as he was bade, and was taken in front of a cage, and, sure enough, there was a real live lion.

"There you are!" said the showman. "You've lost! Hand over the five pounds!"

"Certainly not!" was the reply. "I bet that you couldn't let me see a real live lion."

"Well," continued the showman, "can't you see that's a real live lion?"

"Maybe it is," was the rejoinder; "but you couldn't let me see it because I'm blind!"—Sent in by L. Bolton, Walthamstow.

THE DAY'S TOTAL.

Farmer Crabb's brook is noted for the number and size of its eels. Fishing therein is "strictly prohibited," which in itself is attraction enough for the small boy. The other evening an urchin was leaving the neighbourhood rather hurriedly, when a youthful friend inquired:

"Caught anything, Bob?"

"Yes," replied Bob, "I have."

"Eel?"

"No; toe!"

His friend understood, and wisely decided to turn back with Bob.—Sent in by F. S. Evans, Plymouth.

A GENUINE CASE.

Visitors to a well-known football-ground were struck by the large number of boys that passed through the turnstile marked "Boys only—Admission threepence." An extra large specimen could be seen pushing his way through the crowd to enter by this turnstile.

"Hi!" shouted the official at the turnstile. "What school do you go to?"

"Oh," answered the lad, "I go to night school, guv'nor!"—Sent in G. Pearl, Sloane Square.

NOT HIS FAULT.

Willie was the only child, and the pride of his mother's heart. One day, as he was about to leave for a party, his mother finally instructed him "that when the cake is handed round to him the first time he was to take a small piece, and say 'Thank you?'; the second time he was to say 'Only a small portion, please'; the third time to say, 'I have had quite enough.'"

In due course Willie arrived home, and found his mother conversing with Mrs. Jones.

"There!" said his mother. "Isn't he a nice-mannered boy?"

"Mother," Willie then broke in again, "they handed the cake the fourth time."

"Well," said his mother, "that was very rude. And what did you say?"

"Well, I didn't know what to say. Then I thought of what papa says, and said: 'For goodness' sake, take the confounded stuff away!'"—Sent in by Miss F. Wheeler, Tottenham.

TRY THESE.

Question: What part of a boat is like a farmer?

Answer: The tiller.

Question: When does a farmer behave badly to his corn?

Answer: When he pulls its ears and threshes it.

Question: When the farmhouse caught fire, what part of it escaped?

Answer: The chimney flue and the door bolted.

Question: What is worse than raining cats and dogs?

Answer: Hailing motor-buses.

—Sent in by Nelson Robinson, Bishop Auckland.

WHAT HE THOUGHT.

Teacher: "What is an anecdote?"

Scholar: "A short, funny tale."

Teacher: "Quite correct. Now give me a sentence containing the word."

Scholar: "A rabbit is an animal with four legs and one anecdote."—Sent in by Miss K. Kerridge, Berks.

SMART!

A solicitor in a Northern town advertised for an office-boy. A lad applied for the situation who had hitherto been employed in the local fish-market.

"And do you think you are efficient for the job?" asked the manager, stepping forward. "Can you do arithmetic?"

"Yes," said the lad. "Have got certificates for it, too."

"Well," continued the manager, "and what would nine pound of salmon be at threepence a pound?"

"Bad, sir!" was the prompt reply.—Sent in by J. Hazlett, Cork.

ECONOMICAL.

The lad was full of excitement when he arrived home from his first day's work in the city.

"Mother," he said, "I've saved five pounds to-day!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said his mother, "And how did you manage it?"

"Why, in the railway-carriage," continued the lad, "it said, 'Anyone pulling the communication-cord without proper cause will be fined five pounds.' So I didn't pull it!"—Sent in by M. Kincaird, Glasgow.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in other-wise than on postcards, will be disregarded.



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